

March 7, 2016

President Ivins,

I'm still waiting for your answers to my CES Letter questions. You stated at the end of our November 2, 2014 meeting that you were not a historian but that you wanted to help me and that you were going to pull in other folks who could help me.

Imagine my shock, after waiting for your answers for a year and a half, to get a phone call from you instead telling me you wanted me to come in to "discuss my membership in the church." No answers...just threats of excommunication.

Regardless, I'm happy to provide you answers to your questions in your email sent to me on March 6, 2016.

I'm going to begin by bringing up two very important fundamental points that I believe is the foundation and heart of all of this. By laying out these two points, I'm in turn helping to sufficiently and completely answer your questions.

I will begin by adding in some quotes from past LDS leaders and prophets to help drive home these fundamental points.

### Quotes:

"If we have the truth, no harm can come from investigation. If we have not the truth, it ought to be harmed." – President J. Reuben Clark

"If a faith will not bear to be investigated; if its preachers and professors are afraid to have it examined, their foundation must be very weak." – George Albert Smith

"Mormonism, as it is called, must stand or fall on the story of Joseph Smith. He was either a prophet of God, divinely called, properly appointed and commissioned, or he was one of the biggest frauds this world has ever seen. There is no middle ground. If Joseph Smith was a deceiver, who willfully attempted to mislead the people, then he should be exposed; his claims should be refuted, and his doctrines shown to be false..."

– President Joseph Fielding Smith

"That is the way I feel about it. Our whole strength rests on the validity of that vision. It either occurred or it did not occur. If it did not, then this work is a fraud. If it did, then it is the most important and wonderful work under the heavens." – President Gordon B. Hinckley

"I have been very grateful that the freedom, dignity, and integrity of the individual are basic in church doctrine. We are free to think and express our opinions in the church. Fear will not

stifle thought. God himself refuses to trammel free agency even though its exercise sometimes teaches painful lessons. Both creative science and revealed religion find their fullest and truest expression in the climate of freedom.” – Elder Hugh B. Brown

“Historians did not create problem areas of the Mormon past, but most of us cannot agree to conceal them, either. We are trying to respond to those problem areas of Mormon experience. Attacking the messenger does not alter the reality of the message.”

– D. Michael Quinn, former assistant to LDS Church Historian Leonard Arrington

“There must be no forbidden questions in Mormonism.” – President J. Reuben Clark

“Some struggle with unanswered questions about things that have been done or said in the past.” – President Dieter F. Uchtdorf

“I think in the past there was a tendency to keep a lot of the records closed or at least not give access to information. But the world has changed in the last generation – *with the access to information on the internet, we can’t continue that pattern*; I think we need to continue to be more open.” – Elder Steven E. Snow, Current Church Historian, [Truth in Church History](#)

*Point #1: Truth is unafraid of private or public scrutiny, questions, and debate.*

## Free Agency = Free Flow of Information

Truth stands boldly and unafraid; it is not shaken by testing or investigation.

Truth has no fear of the light. If an individual or organization seeks to silence doubt or questioning – in the private room or in the town square - it is filled with fear and its house is built on sand.

Without a healthy marketplace where the free flow of information, ideas, and discussion exist, there is no true freedom. There is no true free agency when an organization withholds, obstructs, inhibits, and censors information – positive or negative – from its members.

As current Church Historian Steven Snow states above, the church followed and continues to follow a pattern of keeping records closed and not giving members access to information. Even though the church does not censor as much as it used to in the pre-Information Age, it still unfortunately censors and obstructs information from getting out to its members.

Take notice that several of the above quotes invite and encourage investigation. What’s an investigation? It’s looking at *all* of the information on the table, *both* positive and negative. The minute that the church interferes with a member’s or investigator’s investigation by withholding

or blocking *any* information from the investigator is the minute that the investigation has been corrupted by the church and the free agency and freedom of the investigator or member is obstructed and robbed.

For many, many members of the church, including myself, “doubt your doubts” or “pray about it” or “give Brother Joseph a break” or “lean on my testimony” or “stay in the boat” or “God not Google” are *not* answers to the problematic facts that directly undermine and challenge the LDS Church’s foundational truth claims.

Fortunately, Elder M. Russell Ballard gave a [recent talk](#) to the Church Educational System this month where he acknowledges this:

“Gone are the days when a student asked an honest question and the teacher responded, ‘Don’t worry about it.’ Gone are the days when a student raised a sincere concern and a teacher bore his or her testimony as a response intended to avoid the issue.”

No more, Elder Ballard said, no matter how sticky the issue...

“To name a few such topics that are less known or controversial, I’m talking about polygamy. Of seer stones. Different accounts of First Vision. The process of translation of the Book of Mormon. Of the Book of Abraham. Gender issues. Race and the priesthood.”

Elder Ballard pointed to the church’s essays (<https://www.lds.org/topics/essays>) and instructed his listeners to “know the content in these essays like you know the back of your hand.”

This is great news as Elder Ballard has just given his apostolic permission to members, including me, to be more open about and discuss the problematic issues threatening the church’s foundational truth claims, many of which are confirmed and verified in the church’s essays.

I have expressed my position on [cesletter.org](http://cesletter.org):

“I believe that members and investigators deserve all of the information on the table to be able to make a fully informed and balanced decision as to whether or not they want to commit their hearts, minds, time, talents, income, and lives to Mormonism.”

**Point #2:** Church censorship and stifling of public discussion of accurate church essay facts in the Mormon marketplace of information literally obstructs the free agency of members of the church.

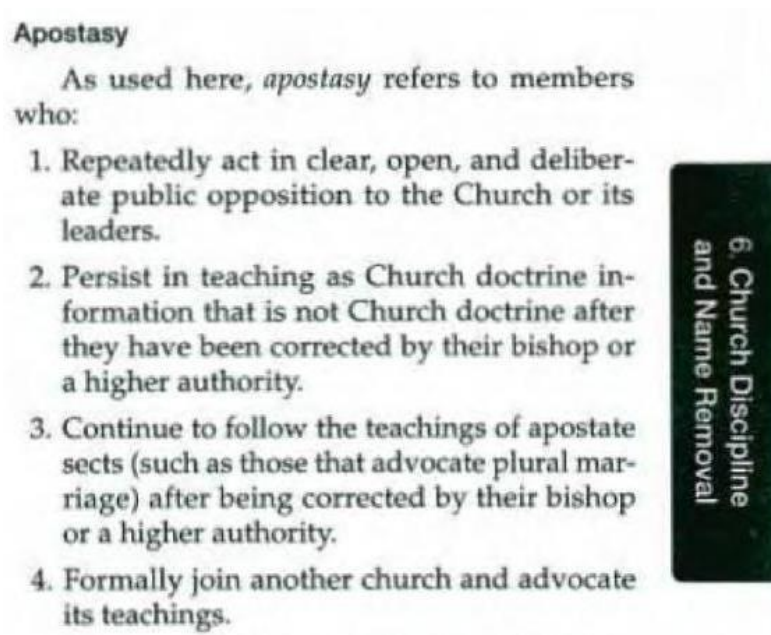
## Please Correct Me

In my letter that I handed to you in the beginning of our November 2, 2014 meeting, I wrote:

“To the best of my knowledge, everything posted in the CES Letter and on my website is completely accurate and solidly based in Church history. My allegiance from the beginning has been to truth, accuracy and transparency. Where I have erred or made mistakes, I have publicly corrected. In the event it is ever brought to my attention that there are any inaccuracies in the CES Letter or on my website, I am totally and completely agreeable and committed to publicly making the corrections.”

This offer still stands today. I have not only offered this in writing but several times in our conversations in our October 19, 2014 and November 2, 2014 meetings.

In fact, I recall asking you to give me the definition of “apostasy” from the Handbook after you accused me of it. You took out your handbook and read the following snippet:



Immediately after you read “persist in teaching as Church doctrine information that is not Church doctrine *after they have been corrected by their bishop or higher authority*,” I immediately responded by stating to you repeatedly:

“I am asking you to correct me and you are not correcting me.”

To this day, I have not been called to repentance and asked to correct any errors or mistakes in the CES Letter or on my website by you or any other priesthood leader. Again, show me where I

am wrong or where I am teaching something that is factually not true and I will be more than happy to publicly correct the errors or mistakes on my website for all to see.

**Point:** You and the church have not corrected me nor given me any errors or mistakes to correct, as required by [Handbook of Instruction 6.7.3](#), before holding any disciplinary action against me.

Any disciplinary action against me without giving me errors or mistakes to publicly correct along with the opportunity to publicly correct and repent of would be a grotesque injustice against me.

Having laid out these important foundational points, I will now directly answer your questions:

### Question #1

**You ask: “What are you trying to accomplish in posting your doctrinal concerns across the internet.”**

With respect, President, your question demonstrates that you either have forgotten the letter that I gave you to read in our November 2, 2014 meeting or that you still do not understand the background and evolution of the CES Letter. For your convenience, in addition to enclosing the letter I handed to you in the beginning of our November 2, 2014 meeting, I am also copying/pasting the relevant part that helps to answer your question:

I originally wrote the *Letter to a CES Director* because the CES Director, a friend of my grandfather, directly requested that I communicate my questions and concerns to him in writing as part of his effort to potentially resolve my questions and concerns with the Church’s origins and history.

After sending my letter to the CES Director I never received a response back from him to my questions and concerns, nor did he ever follow through with scheduling a meeting between us.

Prior to sending my 80 page letter to the CES Director, I shared the letter with folks on Facebook and Reddit for editing and feedback purposes in my desire to ensure that the information contained in the letter I was sending to the CES Director was as accurate as possible.

The folks that I shared the letter with online for editing and feedback found value in it for themselves to give to their own family members and friends who were asking them why they had doubts and concerns with the truth claims of the LDS Church. This was the catalyst and beginning of the CES Letter circulating on the Internet.

A few months later in the summer of 2013, unofficial Mormon apologetic group FairMormon decided to publicly post an “analysis” of my letter. Unfortunately, FairMormon made direct personal attacks on me, my integrity and my character in their response. In addition to inaccurate personal ad hominem attacks, FairMormon made outrageously false claims in their attempt to discredit both me and the CES Letter.

At the time I was presented with a choice: Allow FairMormon to continue to unfairly and dishonestly publicly tarnish my name, integrity and character without challenge or to defend myself. I chose to defend myself.

As a direct result of FairMormon’s personal attacks and dishonest claims, I found it necessary to create my current website to host my direct rebuttals and responses to FairMormon. The only reason why my website exists in its current form today is because of FairMormon’s unethical and hostile attack on me and my letter. The website exists for the purpose of being able to directly respond, in an organized manner, to those who have attacked me and continue to attack me.

I didn’t wake up one day and decide to create CES Letter and cesletter.org. Ditto for *Debunking FairMormon’s Debunking* and my responses to other unofficial Mormon apologists who attacked me.

**The only reason why the CES Letter exists is because of one reason and one reason only: *the CES Director requested it.***

The reason why my responses to *FairMormon* and other unofficial Mormon apologist attacks exist: to defend my name, character and integrity from *FairMormon’s* blatantly dishonest attacks, at full display on <http://cesletter.com/debunking-fairmormon>. Additionally, its purpose is to have an open discussion on the issues troubling so many Latter-day Saints - a conversation, by the way, these Mormon apologists started and initiated first with their attacks against me.

The only reason why cesletter.org exists is because I needed a centralized place to be able to provide my defense and responses to the various personal attacks on my integrity by *FairMormon* and other unofficial Mormon apologists. Additionally, I needed a centralized authorized place for people to access the most up-to-date and accurate CES Letter as the original was before any of the church’s essays. I wanted to make sure that the church’s essays along with corrections were included in the document.

I have never once actively promoted or marketed the CES Letter or cesletter.org on any paid media (PPC, Banner Displays, Billboards, Mailings, etc.). Total marketing spend in 3 years: \$0.

As mentioned above, the CES Letter went viral online because of other people who also share the same questions and concerns I do, independent of my involvement.

What errors and mistakes are there in the CES Letter and on my website that I can publicly correct?

If there are no errors or mistakes, why am I being punished for seeking and sharing the truth?

What questions am I being punished for asking?

## Question #2

**You ask: “Explain your seeking funding on the internet to address and develop new material related to your concerns that you have with Church doctrine.”**

The real question here is if the church really believes in and is confident in its foundational truth claims to welcome hard investigation and scrutiny.

The real question here is if the church believes in a healthy and balanced Mormon marketplace of information that includes *both* positive and negative **facts** about its truth claims.

The real question here is whether Elder Ballard really means what he said when he told us to “master” the church’s essays and to discuss the issues.

I accept and embrace the theme from the quotes above. I’m a firm believer in free agency and individual freedom. I’m a firm believer that the free flow of information is absolutely essential and paramount to the free agency of the individual.

If the church seeks to suppress negative facts being discussed in the Mormon marketplace of information and to excommunicate those who have doubts, questions and concerns, the church demonstrates that it really is not interested in balance or any real and meaningful intellectual conversation on the concessions given in its essays.

In other words, by censoring and suppressing individuals like me who are contributing to the Mormon marketplace of information, the church is demonstrating that all of the claims made above by its leaders along with Ballard’s “master the essays” are ultimately just empty words.

The *CES Letter Foundation*, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, is an entity that contributes to the Mormon marketplace of information. Like other unofficial Internet Mormon organizations such as [FairMormon](#), [Mormon Interpreter](#), [SHIELDS](#), etc., the *CES Letter Foundation* accepts donations.

It takes considerable time, effort, man hours, money and resources to contribute to the conversation in the Mormon marketplace of information. *FairMormon*, *Mormon Interpreter* and

other Mormon organizations understand and get this, which is exactly why they also accept donations as well.

To claim or imply that the acceptance of donations is wrong for *CES Letter Foundation* but totally okay for organizations like *FairMormon* and *Mormon Interpreter* is to demonstrate that the church does not value balance, free flow of facts and any real honest intellectual discussion in the Mormon marketplace of information.

*FairMormon* themselves have published most of the issues found in my 80 page CES Letter followed by their unofficial, uneven, and unsatisfying “answers” and pet theories promoting a bizarre version of Mormonism that Chapel Mormons would not recognize. *FairMormon* even lists [more issues](#) than the CES Letter does. In fact, I credit *FairMormon* for helping to make the CES Letter go as viral online as it has.

Why is it wrong for me to publish issues but not for them? After all, there are many Mormons who leave the church after going to *FairMormon* in an attempt to get answers to their doubts and concerns only to find more questions and issues than they had to begin with. Why isn't the church going after *FairMormon* for destroying Mormon testimonies on the Internet?

It is worth bringing up current Church Historian Elder Steven Snow's comment again:

“I think in the past there was a tendency to keep a lot of the records closed or at least not give access to information. But the world has changed in the last generation – ***with the access to information on the internet, we can't continue that pattern***; I think we need to continue to be more open.”

– Elder Steven E. Snow, Current Church Historian, [Truth in Church History](#)

Part of the church's antiquated pattern that it still clenches to in 2016 is the pattern of trying to censor and punish open/public discussion and debate on the issues – especially when doubt and critical questions are expressed by members. This pattern has been disastrous for the church in the Age of Google and Facebook. This pattern of applying 20<sup>th</sup> century censorship and control tactics in a 21<sup>st</sup> century social media connected world is seen as nothing short of Orwellian.

Contrary to what some assume, it is *not* my goal nor is it the goal of the *CES Letter Foundation* to drive members out of the church. My goal has been to get official answers from the church as promised me by its CES Director three years ago. My goal is to defend my name and integrity from blatant dishonest attacks. My goal is the truth, which is why I have asked you and the church repeatedly to correct me and show me errors and mistakes for me to publicly correct.

It is not me or the CES Letter itself that causes people to leave, if they do, but rather the facts and information verified by the church's own essays and other LDS approved sources that test



and challenge testimonies. It is not only the disturbing facts that trouble members, it is the betrayal that many members feel learning these troubling facts for the first time after a lifetime of discipleship and faithful study of correlated church history.

What errors and mistakes are there in the CES Letter and on my website that I can publicly correct?

If there are no errors or mistakes, why am I being punished for seeking and sharing the truth?

What questions am I being punished for asking?

### Question #3

**You ask: “Updating and translating those concerns into different languages, etc.”**

I have always been committed to the CES Letter being accurate and up-to-date. When I sent the CES Letter to the CES Director in April 2013, the church had yet to release its first essay. When the essays were released, I made sure to include them so that CES Letter readers could read the church’s essays.

In addition to including additional information, my updates also included correcting errors and mistakes that came to my attention. Updating the CES Letter is a good thing as without updating it, I would be doing a disservice to CES Letter readers as well as the church by not correcting errors and mistakes along with not including the church’s essays.

As for translations, I have spent exactly \$0 on translations. The only reason why I’m offering translations is because volunteers have given me translations of the CES Letter in their own languages. Some of these volunteers have offered the translations before I announced to the public that I was including translations. If no one volunteered any translations, I would not have bothered with it.

Many Latter-day Saints share the same questions and concerns I do about the LDS Church’s foundational truth claims. They’re starving for answers. These questions and concerns are not confined to the English language and these Latter-day Saints are not confined to the United States. It is a global issue for the church.

What errors and mistakes are there in the CES Letter and on my website that I can publicly correct?

If there are no errors or mistakes, why am I being punished for seeking and sharing the truth?

What questions am I being punished for asking?

## “Opposition to the Church”

You state: “After reviewing your website and your statements, there are many who might suggest that you are openly and publicly acting in opposition to the Church.”

“The honest investigator must be prepared to follow wherever the search of truth may lead. Truth is often found in the most unexpected places. He must, with fearless and open mind ‘insist that facts are far more important than any cherished, mistaken beliefs, no matter how unpleasant the facts or how delightful the beliefs.’”  
– Elder Hugh B. Brown

While I can understand and appreciate that point of view, President, my response is that it is not only an inaccurate perception but it is a simplistic one that is very black and white.

Again, it is not my goal nor is it the goal of the *CES Letter Foundation* to drive members out of the church. My goal has been to get official answers from the church as promised me by its CES Director three years ago.

Again, it is not me or the CES Letter itself that causes people to leave, if they do, but rather the facts and information verified by the church’s own essays and other LDS approved sources that test and challenge testimonies. It is not only the disturbing facts that trouble members, it is the betrayal that many members feel learning these troubling facts for the first time after a lifetime of discipleship and faithful study of correlated church history.

The church’s essays are shaking many, many members’ testimonies. In fact, there are members who see the essays themselves as acting in opposition to the church and its foundational truth claims.

The great irony is that yesterday’s “anti-Mormon lies” are now today’s church essay facts.

Yesterday’s historians and members with questions have been disciplined and excommunicated on accusations that they were “acting in opposition to the church” simply by publishing and discussing the very same information and facts verified today publicly by the church’s own essays. Many wonder if the church will ever reverse those excommunications and apologize to those historians and individuals for being ahead of their time by speaking and writing the truth.

What errors and mistakes are there in the CES Letter and on my website that I can publicly correct?

If there are no errors or mistakes, why am I being punished for seeking and sharing the truth?

What questions am I being punished for asking?

## What Am I Being Punished For?

President, I wrote the following in my November 2, 2014 letter to you:

“It is my position that if the Church seeks to remove my membership, it is committing a grotesque injustice by punishing me for sharing the truth, most of which truths are now verifiable today through the Church’s new essays. This is especially true in light of my verbal and written promise and willingness to publicly correct any mistakes and errors in the CES Letter and website.”

This is still my position and offer today.

I have done nothing wrong. As Mormon historian and scholar D. Michael Quinn wrote:

“Attacking the messenger does not alter the reality of the message.”

If a disciplinary council were held for my asking questions, pursuing truth and defending my name, the church would show that it was speaking out of both sides of its mouth - professing open and honest dialogue, yet punishing those who choose to participate at that level.

In the end, President, I know that you will do what you feel is appropriate. Some leaders, like [Hans Mattsson](#), an area authority in Sweden, when confronted with members asking these difficult and unanswered questions, took the attitude of realizing that if members in his stewardship had sincere questions, then it would be wrong for him to discipline them without first examining the issues completely himself. Once he did that he realized that those questions were significant and the church would best serve its members by providing answers. Rather than acting in an authoritarian manner against his fellow Saints and disciplining any of them who had questions, he saw that it was his pastoral duty to be an advocate for them and to help elevate those questions to higher levels of authority so that authoritative answers could be provided.

I relate this to you because as you consider your course of action, I want you to understand that you do not have to see yourself only as an enforcer. You can be an advocate for the Saints in your Stake. Understand that good, sincere members who value truth will study church history from many sources - the church essays, FairMormon, and even the CES Letter. They will have legitimate questions that remain unanswered. You have the authority and responsibility to stand up for truth and right.

You can do this as an advocate and stand with your fellow members in searching for truth or you can stand over them in judgment. The choice is yours.

If I were to be excommunicated and kicked out of the church for asking questions and for sharing truth despite my verbal and written offers to publicly correct any mistakes and errors in the CES

Letter or website, the church would be telling the world that it is not interested in honesty, transparency, and fairness.

Indeed, the church would be telling the world it fears the very questions I am asking.

Jeremy T. Runnells