



## Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011

---

Volume 9 | Number 2

Article 17

---

1997

### A Betrayal of Trust

Duane Boyce

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr>

---

#### BYU ScholarsArchive Citation

Boyce, Duane (1997) "A Betrayal of Trust," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011*: Vol. 9 : No. 2 , Article 17.

Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/msr/vol9/iss2/17>

This Polemics is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon 1989–2011* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact [scholarsarchive@byu.edu](mailto:scholarsarchive@byu.edu), [ellen\\_amatangelo@byu.edu](mailto:ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu).



---

NEAL A. MAXWELL INSTITUTE  
FOR RELIGIOUS SCHOLARSHIP

---

BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY • PROVO, UTAH

**Title** A Betrayal of Trust

**Author(s)** Duane Boyce

**Reference** *FARMS Review of Books* 9/2 (1997): 147-63.

**ISSN** 1099-9450 (print), 2168-3123 (online)

**Abstract** Review of *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* (1997), by D. Michael Quinn.

**D. Michael Quinn. *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power*. Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1997. xii + 928 pp., with appendixes and index. \$44.95.**

Reviewed by Duane Boyce

### A Betrayal of Trust

It is not clear from his phrasing whether he intended those words to apply to Mormons generally or to the hierarchy specifically, but the hierarchy would be included if Gibbons intended the phrase to refer to Mormons generally. (p. 416 n. 95)

D. Michael Quinn's *The Mormon Hierarchy: Extensions of Power* has a narrative text of 630 pages; the appendixes and index add another 300. Of the narrative pages, more than 200 are composed of Quinn's endnotes. The notes themselves number over 2,500, and the references cited in them number far more than that. So a lot of research is on display here.

The question is, How good is the research? Are Quinn's readings and interpretations to be trusted? Is this the "magisterial," "brilliant," and "impeccably researched" study its admirers claim it to be?

One way to begin answering this question is to look at a representative sample of Quinn's lengthy book—say, the first chapter—and see how it stands up to scrutiny. If our initial checks of that chapter reveal scholarly deficiencies we ought to check further. If those additional checks also fail we can begin drawing conclusions not only about our first-chapter sample but about Quinn's methodology and book as a whole.

## An Initial Check

Let's take as our first check this sentence near the end of chapter 1:

While they acknowledge that Packer previously was "less than diplomatic," "dogmatic, bigoted," "offended people," and got "agitated and lashed out" as a church administrator, his biographer and Apostle Neal A. Maxwell have recently said that Packer "has grown" out of such behavior. (p. 20)

This is a remarkable sentence. It's the sort of investigative discovery many readers expect to find in a carefully researched study of the "Mormon hierarchy": one apostle, Neal A. Maxwell, reports that another apostle, Boyd K. Packer, has been, among other things, "dogmatic" and "bigoted" as a church administrator. This statement is especially revealing because, as most Latter-day Saint readers will know, this report comes from a member of the quorum who is junior to the member about whom he is reporting. (This is significant because by this point in his book Quinn has already explained that junior members generally defer to senior members of the quorum.)

So this is quite a discovery. But now we must ask, Is it true?

Alas, no. Quinn simply has it wrong. The actual reference in President Packer's biography, from which Quinn is quoting, is this statement *by the biographer*: "[President Packer's] talks have been listened to and appreciated by members throughout the Church. But in the minds of some few he has been viewed as controversial, dogmatic, bigoted."<sup>1</sup>

The charge of dogmatism and bigotry which the biographer attributes to "some few" members of the church, *Quinn attributes to Neal A. Maxwell and to the biographer herself*. This can be no mere error. Surely an author of Quinn's scholarly attainments doesn't make a mistake this big unless he wants to make it. This seems nothing less than a deliberate attempt to create a false impression, a deliberate attempt to mislead.

---

<sup>1</sup> Lucile C. Tate, *Boyd K. Packer: A Watchman on the Tower* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995), 264.

This is the worst, but not the only, inaccuracy in Quinn's sentence. For one thing, this view of "some few" members of the church is obviously related to President Packer's public role as a speaker and teacher, not to his role as a behind-the-scenes administrator. Moreover, it is not Elder Maxwell, but Elder Oaks, who reported previous impressions of President Packer as "less than diplomatic." And it is neither of them, but the biographer, who reports that President Packer "sometimes offended people."<sup>2</sup> And in both cases Quinn leaves off relevant details: Elder Oaks's remark appears in the context of overall *praise* of President Packer<sup>3</sup> and in the biographer's note about offense, Quinn noticeably omits the word *sometimes* (p. 20).<sup>4</sup> And even in the one thing Quinn gets technically right about Elder Maxwell, he still gets wrong in context: Quinn seems to imply that President Packer tended to lash out rather indiscriminately at *people*, whereas Elder Maxwell says that President Packer in the past "might have . . . lashed out against *something* that wasn't right."<sup>5</sup>

Let's stay within the paragraph to conduct our second check. Here is Quinn's opening sentence of that paragraph:

The presiding quorums have sometimes tailored their minutes to fulfill the requirements of unanimous voting. (p. 19)

This is another revealing sentence. We may not know exactly what is meant by "tailoring minutes," but it certainly *sounds* suspicious. If ever a sentence begged for a reference, a note, an example, or an explanation, this is it.

Unfortunately, Quinn gives no citation for his claim; he does not tell us how he knows about such "tailoring" of minutes and he gives no examples. Nor does he tell us what he means by "tailoring." We are just left with the vague impression that Quinn knows all about it, and that whatever it is, it must be negative (after all, nothing called the "tailoring of minutes" could be *good*).

In these few words, then, Quinn authoritatively reports that something negative sometimes happens—but he does not tell us

---

2 Ibid., 161.

3 Ibid., 262.

4 See *ibid.*, 161.

5 *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

exactly what that something is, does not tell us how he knows it happens, and gives no examples of its occurrence.

In the next two sentences Quinn repeats these errors:

Personal diaries are usually the only source for instances in which general authorities have abstained from voting or have voted in dissent. It is easier to sanitize minutes than for general authorities to contain their anger after losing a vote. (p. 19)

To determine if what Quinn says is true we would have to compare the diary entry of a General Authority who cast a negative vote (or abstained), to the official minutes of the meeting in which it happened. But Quinn does not do this. He merely asserts that diaries are the only source for examples of dissent and contrasts this with the “sanitized” official minutes.

For our next check, let’s look at the paragraph immediately preceding this one. Quinn reports here that church leaders sometimes manage their disagreement on an issue—particularly with authorities higher than themselves—by abstaining from voting on that issue. He then says:

Abstaining is only partially successful in avoiding confrontation. Apostle John Henry Smith noted, “Prest. Geo. Q. Cannon spoke to me today about my not voting with my quorum on many occasions and thought I was not doing right.” Ironically, two years later Cannon refused to vote on a matter. (p. 19)

This is an odd report. Quinn first tells us that abstention does not always avoid confrontation and then exemplifies this point with a story so mild that calling it a “confrontation” seems almost laughable. He then adds that “ironically” George Q. Cannon himself once abstained from voting. Quinn finds it ironic that a man would speak to another about abstaining “many” times from voting, and then, two years (and how many hundreds of votes?) later, manage to do the same thing himself. Once.

We’ve barely begun our sampling of Quinn’s book, but already we have reason for concern. In the first seven sentences we have examined, Quinn has not only resorted to special pleading to reach a desired conclusion (the last example), but has also (1) re-

ported the facts inaccurately four times, (2) distorted the tone of original reports three times, (3) failed to substantiate a claim twice, and (4) failed to define key terms (terms that are allowed to create suspicion) twice. As we will see, such errors and distortions continue.

## Sacred Experiences

Quinn discusses the sacred experiences of modern apostles. He says "evidence indicates that a decreasing number of apostles [in the twentieth century] experienced visions before or after ordination" (p. 2). This, he says, has led to a change in the way apostles phrase their "special witness" of Christ: in the twentieth century—as opposed to the nineteenth—apostles have borne testimonies less in terms of actually seeing the Savior and more in terms of knowing of his reality "as if" they had seen him. "Usually," Quinn says, "this involved wording their 'special witness' of Christ in a way that encouraged listeners to assume the leader has had a more dramatic encounter with the divine than actually claimed" (p. 2). In other words, there has been a general decline in sacred apostolic experiences in this century, and apostles of this century have "usually" borne testimony in a false and misleading way.

To begin with, I wish Quinn would not speak as casually as he does of sacred things. He writes of these matters in the same tone he might use to describe dinner appointments or baseball scores. I have no hesitation in saying that this is just wrong and that only a peculiar and deep kind of blindness could fail to see that it is wrong.

But there is more. Another of Quinn's points is that apostles in this century have seemed more reluctant to speak about sacred experiences than their nineteenth-century counterparts, and he cites an example (pp. 2, 5). But if this is true, then Quinn should *expect* to find fewer public accounts of such experiences in the twentieth century and he should *expect* to find more careful wording of testimonies: reluctance to speak would lead to both.

But does Quinn even consider this possibility when he discovers fewer public references to sacred experiences and more careful wording of testimonies in the twentieth century? Not a bit.

He simply concludes that the experience must not occur as frequently as in the past and that the apostles, by their careful wording, must be prevaricating.

So first Quinn makes the mistake of considering only one possible explanation for what he has discovered. Second, in doing so he ignores the obvious alternative explanation that is found in his own text.

Quinn then compounds these errors by a misreading of President Packer. In an early talk President Packer addressed the objection that apostles don't speak more clearly about their testimonies; President Packer dismissed the objection, Quinn says, as seeking "for a witness to be given in some new and dramatic and different way" (p. 3). For Quinn, this puts President Packer among those he thinks emphasize the "as if" nature of apostolic testimony. However, had Quinn read President Packer's full talk—not just the portion quoted in his biography—he would have known this is a mistake. Quinn blunders on this point because he simply failed to do his homework.

Along the way Quinn completely overlooks external evidence that weakens his claim. He overlooks, for example, Ezra Taft Benson's statement regarding the witness of modern apostles generally,<sup>6</sup> as well as the discussion by Harold B. Lee, which President Benson references in making his own statement.<sup>7</sup> He also overlooks Boyd K. Packer's explicit explanation for apostles' reticence to speak openly of sacred experiences—"we have been commanded not to do so"<sup>8</sup>—as if a comment by a twentieth-century apostle about testimonies were irrelevant to a study of twentieth-century apostles' testimonies. I won't cite them here, but Quinn also omits individual accounts of sacred experiences that have appeared in church literature and that obviously weaken his thesis.

In this connection (as in others) Quinn is eager to report apparent contradictions. He reports President Packer's reluctance to speak of sacred things by sharing his statement that "I do not tell

---

<sup>6</sup> *Church News*, 27 January 1985, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Harold B. Lee, *Stand Ye in Holy Places* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1974), 65.

<sup>8</sup> Boyd K. Packer, "A Tribute to the Rank and File of the Church," *Ensign* (May 1980): 65.



all I know. If I did, the Lord could not trust me” (p. 5) and then remarks: “Such a standard would put Lorenzo Snow, George Q. Cannon, David O. McKay, and David B. Haight under divine condemnation” (p. 5). Quinn thinks he sees a contradiction—President Packer says one thing, others do another. But Quinn sees a contradiction only because he is determined to see one. Nothing is easier to understand than a general spiritual restriction that admits individual exceptions—especially when the scriptures explicitly teach it (D&C 63:64). But Quinn does not see this; to him it is a simple contradiction. This is not serious interpretive scholarship.

Another omission is glaring. Quinn says, for example, that official charges to twentieth-century apostles “no longer obligated apostles to seek visions” (p. 2). This is in contrast, Quinn points out, to Oliver Cowdery’s original charge to the Twelve in which he told the apostles that they should “never cease striving until [they had] seen God face to face” (p. 1). Quinn gives examples that provide some indirect support to his thesis, and twice he takes quite evident delight in contrasting Oliver Cowdery’s strong statement with later and weaker (though *not* authoritative) statements. “Cowdery would not recognize that weak paraphrasing,” he says in one place (p. 4).

But in all this Quinn makes no mention of the single statement most relevant to his topic. It is the discussion by Bruce R. McConkie in his widely read book, *The Promised Messiah*.<sup>9</sup> Here is a statement made by a twentieth-century apostle about the testimonies of twentieth-century apostles, and it is ignored in Quinn’s study of the testimonies of twentieth-century apostles. Is it only coincidence that Elder McConkie’s discussion flatly contradicts Quinn’s thesis and that it quotes liberally from—you guessed it—Oliver Cowdery?

This brings us to another example of Quinn’s eagerness to report apparent contradictions. He contrasts a statement in the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* about sign-seeking (“spurious visions result from seeking ‘signs’; authentic visions usually come unbidden”)<sup>10</sup> with Oliver Cowdery’s charge to the Twelve (see p. 4). He again sees a discrepancy. Of course Quinn fails to

---

<sup>9</sup> Bruce R. McConkie, *The Promised Messiah* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 147–8.

<sup>10</sup> Allen E. Bergin, “Visions,” in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 4:1511.

mention that the *Encyclopedia* article was written regarding the Saints in general, while Cowdery's statement was a specific charge to the Twelve. He also fails to explain exactly how Oliver Cowdery's charge to the Twelve is an encouragement for them to seek *signs*. Quinn merely creates the appearance of contradiction between nineteenth- and twentieth-century attitudes—and leaves it at that.

### Heber J. Grant and Spiritual Experience

Quinn reports: "Sometimes LDS leaders made specific claims for charisma that exceeded their experiences" (p. 3); he cites Heber J. Grant as an example:

As church president after 1918, Heber J. Grant told general conferences that as a newly ordained apostle, "I seemed to see, and I seemed to hear" a heavenly meeting involving his deceased father and Joseph Smith. However, decades earlier Grant told the Twelve privately that "although he had always desired to see his father in a dream or vision that he had never been allowed to enjoy this privilege." Concerning Grant's public claims while church president, his scholarly biographer has noted that Grant later acknowledged: "I really saw and heard nothing." (p. 3)

So Heber J. Grant has been caught in a lie. First he said he didn't, then he said he did, then later he "acknowledged" that he didn't. Or so Quinn says.

In contrast, here's the way President Grant's story is told by his biographer, one of Quinn's sources for the story:

Separating himself from the main party [with whom he was traveling some months after his call to the Twelve] and dismounting his mule, [Heber J. Grant] pondered once again his apostolic calling. As he did so, he "*seemed to see and seemed to hear*" ("I really saw and heard nothing," he later explained) a heavenly council. Jedediah Grant and Joseph Smith . . . were discussing the long-standing vacancies in the Quorum of the Twelve. "Why not choose the boy who bears my name

and who belongs to you?" he sensed Jedediah saying.<sup>11</sup>

Quinn's interpretation of the Heber J. Grant episode is at best thick-headed. Rather than ponder the meaning of Elder Grant's careful expression "*seemed to see and seemed to hear*," Quinn simplistically juxtaposes these expressions with denials of *actual* seeing and hearing . . . and pronounces the account a fabrication. Nonsense. In some cases spiritual experience is a deep sensing, a deep knowing, that so closely resembles physical seeing that the comparison is irresistible; at the same time, the experience can't be precisely captured by ocular terms because it is not seeing in the physical sense. Because it *is* seeing, but of a different, spiritual, sort, it is appropriately described to others as a "seeming to see" or perhaps as a "sensing"—as a way to distinguish the experience from the straightforward physical seeing listeners might otherwise infer.

A contemporary example comes from the missionary memoirs of Elder John H. Groberg. In a single account—almost in one sentence—he first *denies* a "seeing" . . . and then claims it.

He says, to begin:

I suddenly received a flash of understanding which, while totally unsolicited, made a deep and clear impression on me. I emphasize that this was not a vision, revelation, or dream, but rather a feeling and an understanding wherein I sensed the following.

Everything in this preface tells us that what follows will not be an account of seeing or hearing. We are explicitly told that it is not a vision or a dream, but a "sensing."

So what are Elder Groberg's first words after this careful preface? "I *saw* a beautiful place . . ." What line opens his second paragraph of the experience? "I *saw* a young man . . ." And what appears in the last sentence of the experience? "I strained to understand and finally *heard* someone say . . ."

---

<sup>11</sup> Ronald W. Walker, "Heber J. Grant," in *The Presidents of the Church: Biographical Sketches*, ed. Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 233, emphasis in the original.

Indeed the whole experience is shared in visual and auditory terms; throughout, Elder Groberg is seeing and hearing things as they happen. Yet he refuses to call it a vision.<sup>12</sup>

The same distinction is at work in the story of Heber J. Grant. He denies ever seeing his father in a dream or a vision, but reports an experience in which he “seemed to see” him and “seemed to hear” him. The distinction is simple.

But it is all opaque to Quinn. He is determined to see a contradiction. That must be why he alters the biographer’s actual report of the incident: the biographer (whom Quinn considers scholarly) says that President Grant “explained” that he really saw and heard nothing, while Quinn changes this to read that President Grant “acknowledged” that he really saw and heard nothing. Quinn transforms an explanation into a confession—not because it’s in the story, or even in the report of the story, but because it’s in his *thesis*. Such historical reporting is neither careful nor ingenuous.

### **Infallibility?**

Quinn’s eagerness to see contradictions reaches its most absurd level in his discussion of “infallibility.” He begins in chapter I with the statement of President J. Reuben Clark that “we are not infallible in our judgment, and we err” (p. 7). He returns to this statement on page 368 where he contrasts it with a statement by Elder M. Russell Ballard that “we will not lead you astray” and by President James E. Faust that the church president “will never mislead the Saints.” Quinn finds a contradiction in all this. Such remarks, he says, are “in contrast” to the statement of President Clark.

But Quinn reaches this conclusion without the slightest attempt to define key terms or to identify the contexts in which the statements were uttered. The man is just not trying.

I know of no reason why the core principle that governs church action should be any different from that which governs individual action. That principle has been articulated recently by Elder Oaks:

---

<sup>12</sup> John H. Groberg, *In the Eye of the Storm* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1993), 239–40.

Revelations from God . . . are not constant. We believe in continuing revelation, not continuous revelation. We are often left to work out problems without the dictation or specific direction of the Spirit. That is part of the experience we must have in mortality. Fortunately, we are never out of our Savior's sight, and if our judgment leads us to actions beyond the limits of what is permissible and if we are listening, . . . the Lord will restrain us by the promptings of his Spirit.<sup>13</sup>

In listening for the promptings of the Spirit, those who lead the church have the benefit of divinely appointed *councils*—"councils and counselors and quorums," in President Packer's words, "to counterbalance the foibles and frailties of man."<sup>14</sup> The institution of such councils, he says, "provides safety for the Church and a high comfort level for each of us who is personally accountable. Under the plan, men of very ordinary capacity may be guided through counsel and inspiration to accomplish extraordinary things."<sup>15</sup> But, he continues, "even with the best of intentions, it does not always work the way it should. Human nature may express itself on occasion, *but not to the permanent injury of the work.*"<sup>16</sup>

Though devoted and spiritually refined, mortal men work as mortal men. Weaknesses and errors manifest themselves. But as a council the Brethren cannot go where the Spirit forbids; they cannot do anything that would cause permanent injury to the work of the Lord.

It was in this spirit that President Joseph Fielding Smith said:

An individual may fall by the wayside, or have views, or give counsel which falls short of what the Lord intends. But the voice of the First Presidency and

---

<sup>13</sup> Dallin H. Oaks, "Teaching and Learning by the Spirit," *Ensign* (March 1997): 14.

<sup>14</sup> Boyd K. Packer, "Revelation in a Changing World," *Ensign* (November 1989): 16.

<sup>15</sup> Boyd K. Packer, "I Say unto You, Be One," in *BYU Devotional and Fireside Speeches, 1990-1991* (Provo, Utah: University Publications, 1991), 84.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

the united voice of those others who hold with them the keys of the kingdom shall always guide the Saints and the world in those paths where the Lord wants them to be.<sup>17</sup>

President Clark is telling the truth when he says, "we are not infallible in our judgment, and we err." And President Hinckley is telling the truth when he says, "The Lord is directing this work, and He won't let me or anyone else lead it astray."<sup>18</sup> There is no contradiction between these statements, and I don't believe we will see one unless we have reason to want to see one.<sup>19</sup>

### Decision-making

Quinn's inaccuracies sometimes appear in odd ways. In his discussion of the role of seniority in decision-making, for example, he reports that "apostles usually speak in order of seniority in council meetings, beginning with the most senior." He then informs us that "junior members are subtly encouraged to tailor their comments to coincide with views already expressed" (p. 9).

As evidence for this claim Quinn cites one apostle's criticism of another for that apostle's tendency to follow the majority of

---

<sup>17</sup> Joseph Fielding Smith, "Eternal Keys and the Right to Preside," *Ensign* (July 1972): 88.

<sup>18</sup> Gordon B. Hinckley, "Excerpts from Recent Addresses of President Gordon B. Hinckley," *Ensign* (July 1996): 73.

<sup>19</sup> Quinn frames this whole issue in terms of conflict between two views of "infallibility"—one represented by President Clark, the other by more recent General Authorities. This way of looking at the matter is muddleheaded, as I have tried to show. But it is all the more remarkable in light of Quinn's biography of J. Reuben Clark. There Quinn reports *President Clark* teaching that "the Latter-day Saints can always follow the Prophet, who will never lead them astray because 'the Lord has never permitted it and he never will.'" D. Michael Quinn, *J. Reuben Clark: The Church Years* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1983), 171. So it is not that President Clark held one view while other General Authorities hold another; as Quinn makes clear (see both pages 171 and 172 of the biography), President Clark himself held both views. This should have been Quinn's first clue that these views are not conflicting at all, but instead are two aspects of a single comprehensive truth about the relationship between the Brethren and the Lord. The wonder is that Quinn could know this about J. Reuben Clark and yet fail to be educated by it. It is even more amazing that, in the context of the issue he is examining here, he fails even to report it.

the group in his thinking. But it is obvious from the example itself that this is not evidence of Quinn's point. If following the senior apostles is as prevalent as Quinn says it is, then why did this apostle single out only one member for criticism? If the charge were true in general, then why didn't he *complain* in general—why did only one member stand out to him? Moreover, the apostle leveling the criticism obviously didn't feel hampered by *his* junior status (though Quinn doesn't tell us this, he was junior to the member he was criticizing)—*otherwise he wouldn't have found anything to criticize in the other member*. Far from supporting his point, Quinn's reference is actually a counterexample. Quinn does provide one other example to support his claim (even though it is not unambiguous), but he explicitly acknowledges five other counterexamples (pp. 9, 11, 20).

Quinn also fails to take notice of another counterinstance: President Kimball's insistence to a young Elder Packer "never to let go" and "never give it up" regarding a matter important to him, even though it seemed he was making no progress in persuading the members of the quorum.<sup>20</sup> How much further can one get from Quinn's report of the relationship between senior and junior members of the Twelve?

Perhaps all of this is why, in another place, Quinn says: "Each member of the Quorum of the Twelve, as in other quorums, can express his views fully about any matter under discussion" (p. 8). This is inconsistent with Quinn's thesis above, of course, but it *is* strongly consistent with the evidence Quinn actually presents. This kind of writing is what one of Quinn's admirers calls the "clear lens" through which we can perceive church leadership. Indeed.

We saw earlier two examples of unsubstantiated claims made by Quinn. There are others.

He says, for instance, that "despite the importance of precedent and the existence of verbatim minutes, authorities rarely ask a quorum secretary to consult long-distant minutes" (p. 7), an assertion he repeats on the following page. This is a sweeping claim, and it may even be true, but Quinn's support for it is less than slender: one example that occurred more than ninety years ago and one quotation that is not about minute-taking in quorum

---

<sup>20</sup> Tate, *Boyd K. Packer*, 249.

meetings at all. Most would not consider this sufficient evidence to justify claims about what “rarely” happens in meetings that have been held in two centuries and that have numbered in the thousands.

Quinn also says that when a leader is uncommitted to a proposal “he then can call for a vote in such a way that predisposes a unanimously negative outcome” (p. 10). His example? “Joseph Smith did this in a meeting with the apostles in 1842: ‘Moved by the Prophet that all those who are in favor of assisting Bro Robinson in printing the Book of Mormon . . . manifest it by the usual signs, not a hand raised, but every hand was raised in the negative’ ” (p. 10). Am I the only one who fails to see how the Prophet “predisposed” a negative outcome in this example?

In another example, Quinn reports the occurrence of “pre-vote lobbying” of individual apostles as a way of achieving unanimity in the quorum (pp. 10–11). That Quinn thinks this significant is indicated by his citation, for one of his two examples, of a “knowledgeable [unnamed] source” “at LDS headquarters” (p. 414 n. 56). The example of such pre-vote lobbying? Elder Hinckley, in order to meet a tight printing deadline, had copies of a pamphlet delivered to four apostles the night before a quorum meeting. Period.

Sometimes Quinn does more than just fail to provide support for his claims; sometimes he resorts to outright distortion. (We’ve seen this before.) He says, for instance, that a presiding officer “may choose to override in one way or another expected or expressed opposition to his proposal” (p. 11). Here’s his example:

The First Presidency wanted to make a major change in the church’s program for Native Americans but knew Apostle Spencer W. Kimball would oppose it. Therefore, the Presidency waited until the summer of 1969 when Kimball was out of the country on assignment in order to obtain the approval from the rest of the Twelve. (p. 11–12)

This is deliberate falsification of the original source. The original source simply reports that a decision was made during a five-week absence of Elder Kimball. It does not say that the First Presidency knew that Elder Kimball would oppose the decision,



and it does not say that the First Presidency waited for Elder Kimball to be away in order to obtain approval of the “rest” of the Twelve. These are Quinn’s fabrications. It is true, as Quinn goes on to say, that the Presidency appeared to single out Elder Kimball for praise when he returned as a way to soften the impact of the decision on him, but the only source for the rest of this story is Quinn himself.

Incidentally (though admitting the decision was “a pretty heavy jolt”), what do you suppose was Elder Kimball’s reaction to this decision? “*Undoubtedly, it is right,*” he remarked.<sup>21</sup> This inconvenient detail, of course, is left unreported by Quinn.

## Trust

Though more difficulties with chapter 1 could be identified, perhaps this is enough of a sample. What has our inquiry shown? We’ve seen instances of (a) blatant misquoting, (b) altering the tone of original reports, (c) making claims (some of them provocative) without documentation, (d) stretching interpretations of incidents to support claims, (e) ignoring obvious explanations for supposed “problems,” (f) reaching false conclusions due to insufficient research, (g) omitting evidence contrary to claims, (h) fabricating supposed “contradictions,” (i) clinging to apparent contradictions that are resolved by even the slightest serious thinking, (j) drawing conclusions contradicted by the book’s own evidence, and (k) actually distorting the record to support a thesis.

Part of the time Quinn’s errors seem inadvertent. “Perhaps he has simply overlooked this particular evidence,” we want to tell ourselves. “Perhaps this failure to see is only accidental.” And I am sure this is the case some of the time.

But this is implausible as a general explanation for Quinn’s failures. This is an author who doesn’t merely thank the “many people” who have helped him over the years in various aspects of his studies; this is an author who lists each one of them by name, alphabetically. This is an author who, in discussing Mormon women studies, doesn’t merely suggest a few general references to

---

<sup>21</sup> Edward L. Kimball and Andrew E. Kimball Jr., *Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1977), 377, emphasis added.

get the interested reader started; this is an author who provides nearly three pages of specific references to consult.

This is not a man prone to overlooking things.

But other problems are even greater than omissions of evidence. Even in our beginning check, Quinn's logic is too often tortured, his supporting examples too often stretched, his search for alternative explanations too often absent, for this to be merely accidental. To some degree a determined and willful blindness must be at work to produce this much distortion.

Consider Quinn's discussion of President Packer in the first instance examined in this review. Transforming a report about the attitudes of "some few" members of the church into a quotation from a member of the Twelve is more than just a mistake: it's a deception. And Quinn's reporting of the Spencer W. Kimball incident—the last case examined above—is even worse in its disingenuousness.

Consider also the quotation from Quinn that begins this review. Quinn has just discussed the announcement of the revelation ending "the church's refusal to ordain blacks" to the priesthood. He says: "The Presidency's secretary adds that when the general authorities ended this race-based restriction, 'it seemed to relieve them of a subtle sense of guilt they had felt over the years'" (p. 17). Quinn then adds in an endnote:

It is not clear from his phrasing whether he intended those words to apply to Mormons generally or to the hierarchy specifically, but the hierarchy would be included if Gibbons intended the phrase to refer to Mormons generally. (p. 416 n. 95)

This kind of logic does not occur by accident. It occurs only when an author is so determined to reach a particular conclusion that he doesn't care how ridiculous his logic must be in order to reach it. A person has to work *hard* to think this poorly; it is the sheerest kind of sophistry.

So no, Quinn's failures cannot be merely inadvertent. More is going on here than mere accident can explain.

So what are we to make of Quinn's book? I think this is largely a question of practicality. *The Mormon Hierarchy* makes too many claims and cites too many sources for any reader to

double-check even a fraction of them—not to mention checking them all. Unfortunately, this is what Quinn's book seems to require. When half the references to Boyd K. Packer in chapter 1 are faulty in one respect or another, how much trust should we put in a whole chapter on Ezra Taft Benson? How much time do we have to double-check everything Quinn says *there*? Similarly, when at least four of the conflicts or contradictions Quinn discusses in chapter 1 turn out to be imaginary, how much trust should we place in a whole chapter on "tension among the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve"?

The fundamental issue is one of trust. Can we trust Quinn to analyze carefully and fairly the issues he examines? Can we trust him to report accurately what his many sources say? Can we trust the examples he uses to support his many claims? Can we trust the quality and objectivity of his logic in reaching his conclusions? Based on our sample, I think the answer must be no to all these questions.

The sheer length and apparent documentation of the book suggest otherwise. They imply careful and impartial scholarship. No wonder the book is hailed, on superficial readings, as "magisterial," "brilliant," and "impeccably researched."

But surely it can be none of these. Not even remotely. If our sample is any indication, the book's substance betrays the very trust its appearance invites. In too many ways it both misleads and distorts; sad to say, it appears to be a book that cannot be read innocently or with confidence. I do not think it too strong to say that the book is a betrayal of the reader's trust. And in this respect the book is also an embarrassment—both to its advance reviewers' giddy praise and to its own scholarly pretensions.

Given this preliminary verdict, based on our sample of chapter 1, we face a choice. We can either continue reading Quinn's book and double-check, as we go (and as we would have to), all of Quinn's examples, conclusions, quotations, and references. Or we can set the book aside and do something else with our time—say, to begin with, reread the book of Helaman.

Others may choose differently, but I'm currently learning a lot from the book of Helaman.