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Author(s) Richard Lloyd Anderson

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Abstract This Annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture was given at Brigham Young University on 20 March 2009. Anderson respects both the Savior, Jesus Christ, and Joseph Smith, seer and revelator. He lays a foundation for the four Gospels and their historical authenticity. He notes the abundance of materials available about Joseph Smith and details his First Vision, the accounts of the Book of Mormon witnesses, sacred influences in Joseph's life, and the significance of the events at Carthage.

PROBING THE LIVES OF CHRIST AND JOSEPH SMITH

Richard Lloyd Anderson

Before probing the lives of Christ and Joseph Smith, I want to thank this special audience for gathering in the cause of religious research. I especially recognize several individuals. Great appreciation goes to director Jerry Bradford and other Maxwell Institute leaders for inviting me to represent the value of studying revelation with careful scholarship. Elder Maxwell's companion, Colleen Hinckley, is here, and children Rebecca, Cory, Nancy, and Jane and companions, on this occasion of honoring Elder Maxwell and what he stood for. My wife, Carma de Jong Anderson, and our children are here, all of whom sacrificed to enable my lifetime studies. Former students and colleagues are present, including Larry Porter, who has done such valuable work on Joseph Smith's early life. Retired teachers know that many students later become their mentors.

President Samuelson began this lecture series by sharing memories of Elder Maxwell and his ideals in action. Elder Bruce Hafen followed with insights into religious truth and into Elder Maxwell gained as an alert biographer. Many feel close to Elder Maxwell personally from his personable communication in public and private. Perhaps we knew him as a respected administrator at the University of Utah. Or we had direct contact when he became Church Commissioner of Education

This Annual Neal A. Maxwell Lecture was originally given at Brigham Young University on 20 March 2009.

and then served in higher levels before becoming the impressive apostle who was both friend and teacher. And how we admired this man given the simultaneous blessing and trial of demonstrating his total integrity under physical suffering and leaving with honor.

Could I create a similar feeling about the early Christians who would meet to recall Christ and his first apostles? Some of our great-grandparents were in this situation in regard to Joseph Smith. T. Edgar Lyon, peerless Nauvoo historian and father of two senior BYU faculty members, wrote about the “old Nauvooers” in his Salt Lake Valley ward who would relate their experiences with Joseph Smith.¹ My study has concentrated on the areas of New Testament and Joseph Smith period history. I’ve never been able to exclude either path from my investigation. Once I explained my Joseph Smith work to a senior and respected New Testament scholar from Duke University, and he strongly advised me to concentrate on Joseph Smith because that was a more accessible topic, whereas early Christianity was remote and to some extent debatable. This lecture reflects ancient and modern research. I continue to be impressed with the parallel claims and comparable validations of early Christianity and the restored church. Arguments you may make for the divinity of Christ and the truth of the original church are matched by similar arguments for the restoration of the gospel. Mormon leaders have said from the beginning that you can’t divide the Bible from the restoration if you are going to be consistent. I will return to Joseph Smith after explaining why I accept the claims of Jesus and his apostles as historically valid.

Foundations of the Four Canonical Gospels

Time restricts what can be said about early Christianity, so I want to work with this subject structurally, showing that many evidential chains verify the historicity of the canonical biographies of Christ. Here we are probing the life of Christ by showing the reliability of

1. T. Edgar Lyon, “Recollections of ‘Old Nauvooers,’” *BYU Studies* 18/2 (1978): 143–50. Quotations in this printing follow spelling and punctuation in the original version. My appreciation is extended to editor Alison Coutts for capably processing the manuscript version of my lecture.

the four Gospels, which record his miraculous power, doctrine, atonement, and resurrection. Their spectacular content goes against the academic habit of ruling out the supernatural. But using legitimate methods in ancient studies, we should be confident that the apostolic generation left records of the Savior's life and teachings. Early in my career I attended an annual convention of the American Historical Association and took a lunch break with De Lamar Jensen, outstanding early modern history professor at Brigham Young University. We sat by a couple of Americanists, one of whom nearly exploded in surprise as he heard the early dates of our disciplines. His first question was an incredulous, "But where are your archives?" The question was essentially, how do you re-create a past that is so long ago?

Christ's Ministry in Paul's Letters

Objective history is constantly based on contemporary records. This reconstruction of the past should depend on firsthand sources, or information traceable to them, which is the question our U.S. history friend was asking. He could go to the National Archives, presidential libraries, newspapers, and so on but could not imagine what kind of records were kept by premodern societies. Christianity emerged in the early Roman Empire, which left behind a huge amount of literary and historical works, copied and recopied because they were in demand, not to speak of private letters and legal documents on papyri, as well as inscriptions of imperial decrees, commemorations, and grave monuments. For the New Testament, I am especially interested in parallel secular collections of letters, for instance, from Roman senator Cicero in the first century BC and from Roman senator Pliny the Younger, bridging the end of the first century AD.

After a consulship, prominent senators were eligible for provincial governorships, and Pliny the Younger became imperial legate over Pontus and Bithynia, adjoining the Black Sea in what today is northern Turkey. Trajan was emperor, ruling between AD 98 and AD 117. Pliny's letters to Trajan combine flattery and administrative need, and one request asks how to treat Christians, who were suspect in the Roman system for disloyalty to the state. Pliny describes putting

some to death without shaking their convictions, but also finding they were relatively harmless, meeting early to renew vows of honesty and chastity, and meeting later to eat a common meal. Not daring to follow common sense, Pliny wrote to the emperor, who answered that a rigid rule was not possible, though anonymous accusations should be rejected; but he did give the general rule that confessed Christians must be punished and recanting Christians should be exonerated upon sacrifice to Roman gods.²

Roman and Christian historians do not question this letter or the collection it comes from. It is attested by early manuscripts, fits into what is known in its time period, and has come to us labeled with the name of Pliny the Younger and grouped with like letters without serious contemporary challenges. If secular historians accept Pliny's letters, why can't religious historians accept Christian letters of the same period with equal or superior attestation? As a professional in ancient history and Christian history, I sense a double standard. Many religious scholars think that acceptance of all New Testament books is uncritical. However, unjustified skepticism can also skew history when there are substantial reasons for accepting the validity of a Gospel or of an apostolic letter. Early acceptance of authorship is significant in judging the historicity of most classical works. The religious historian may demand "proof" for a New Testament book that is unrealistic in ancient history. Religious preconceptions aside, evidence for authenticity of New Testament letters mostly equals or exceeds that for letters or books accepted from prominent personalities in antiquity.

The early collection of fourteen letters of Paul is comparable to the letters of Pliny the Younger. Nine of Paul's letters to churches and groups were found in a papyrus collection transcribed around AD 200, which gives a very short gap between actual composition and the oldest known copy.³ New Testament manuscripts are generally dated much closer to the time of composition than most classical writings

2. Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 10.96-97, in Pliny [the Younger], *Letters and Panegyricus*, trans. Betty Radice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969).

3. See the facsimile edition of Frederic G. Kenyon, *The Chester Beatty Biblical Papyri, Fasciculus III Supplement* (London: Emery Walker, 1936).

are. The AD 200 collection just mentioned, part of the Chester Beatty Papyri, contains all letters that Paul wrote to churches or groups save one, 2 Thessalonians, which was obviously part of the copied manuscript since pages have flaked off and 1 Thessalonians is one of the nine preserved letters. Hebrews is second in this early Pauline collection, placed right after Romans and before 1 Corinthians, which supports my minority view that Paul wrote Hebrews in rabbinical style to strengthen Greek-speaking Jewish converts.⁴

Paul's letters build a solid bridge to the four Gospels. As just suggested, authorship of given letters may be debated. That is not as significant as it sounds, for skepticism generates many spurious arguments. I accept the authorship of the fourteen letters attributed to Paul in the King James Bible. New Testament studies are flawed by trends and speculative theories not really capable of proof. Avoiding peripheral discussion here, I emphasize that the four letters whose Pauline authorship is least questioned are Romans, 1 Corinthians, 2 Corinthians, and Galatians. They were championed by Reformers as embodying the doctrine of justification by faith, but they also tell most about Paul personally and his relationship with earlier apostles. The evidence for the core four is solid, though I think other letters have similar credibility. Yet given the wide recognition that Paul is the author of these four, we can pursue our source chain to the Gospels through 1 Corinthians.

Paul's Corinthian letters were written before AD 60, and Paul reviews what he taught in Corinth about AD 50. Like other letters, Paul wrote to strengthen and reconvert, but his passionate reminders take us into Corinthian meetings and state that Paul taught facts about Christ told by Peter and other apostles who were taught by Christ. A point of beginning is chapter 11 of 1 Corinthians, where Paul asks the Corinthians to take the bread and wine as Jesus commanded. Where did Paul get this information about Christ? He said, "For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you," followed by a detailed, fifth version of the Last Supper, consistent

4. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Understanding Paul*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2007), 193–98.

with the Gospels and close to the account in Luke. “Received of the Lord” reflects Paul’s confidence that what Christ said and did has been relayed to him intact. “Received of the Lord” does not refer to a known vision or revelation to Paul on that subject. But Paul does mention direct contacts with the Galilean apostles. In Galatians, Paul minimizes this contact to show the Galatians that his own revelations regarding Christ are as true as Peter’s. At the same time, Paul insists that both apostles had spent time together and saw eye to eye. In his words, three years after his Damascus vision, “I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days” (Galatians 1:18). In my generation a senior British scholar used acceptable sarcasm by asking whether Peter and Paul spent this two weeks just talking about the weather. The point is that Paul did not invent the divine Christ, as many scholars so often say, but relayed what earlier apostles knew from walking with the Master.

However, a countermodel to this biblical picture is advanced by perhaps the majority of influential New Testament scholars. They contend that the Gospels were produced by doctrinal and historical evolution. Here is a simplified version of this reasoning: A late date for all canonical Gospels is presupposed, from about AD 70 to 110.⁵ Christ lived to about AD 33, so what was happening in the third of a century between his death and the biographical era beginning about AD 70? Revisionary scholarship claims that unnamed missionaries circulated stories by mid-century, telling about Christ’s parables, miracles, and sayings, all patterns or forms, hence the name “form criticism.” The

5. Christ’s long prophecy about the temple’s destruction (Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21) was remarkably fulfilled in AD 70, when a Roman army plundered the city and demolished the temple. Without trusting divine prediction, liberal scholars contend that these chapters incorporate many historical details and thus were written after AD 70. But this is inference, not evidence. A counterinference is based on the anticlimactic end of Acts, which takes Paul to Rome and abruptly ends before he was brought to Caesar’s judgment about AD 63, which most likely indicates that the final chapter of Acts was written before this hearing was held. Since Acts is a sequel to Luke’s Gospel (Acts 1:1), dating Acts to about AD 62 would suggest that Luke wrote his Gospel when Paul was imprisoned in Israel about AD 58–60; and Luke’s preface (Luke 1:1–3) speaks of earlier, orderly Christian narratives, suggesting that Matthew and Mark were perhaps written at mid-century.

stories changed in the telling, and thus variant versions appear for similar events in the Gospels, which are based not on eyewitnesses of Christ's life, but rather on oral traditions as expanded in the middle third of the first century.

Here literary and historical source methods violently conflict. Instead of speculative "trajectories," consistent source scholars should accept Paul's mid-century letters, which indicate that some original apostles yet lived and with Paul were a force for maintaining Christ's doctrine and history. We have seen how Paul learned what Peter knew in their fifteen-day visit well before AD 40. We have seen how Paul depended on early information in teaching the significance of the Lord's Supper. And writing in the supposed period of shifting stories, Paul wrote 1 Corinthians well before AD 60, calling on that Christian branch not to abandon the historical resurrection that he and other apostles had been preaching for two decades. Telling the Corinthians a second time that he preached "what I also received," Paul testified that Christ "died for our sins" and "rose again the third day," which Paul supported by naming five appearances of the resurrected Christ, three of which are also in the four Gospels. Paul added that the first apostles would verify this information: "Therefore, whether it were I or they, so we preach and so ye believed" (1 Corinthians 15:1-11).

Instead of mid-century evolution, Paul's great Corinthian letter shows that the closing episodes of the Gospels came from personal knowledge of the original Christians and their leaders, including James, apostolic brother of the Lord, who was with Paul in Jerusalem on important occasions there. These leaders met when Paul came to Jerusalem to see Peter (Acts 9:27-30; Galatians 1:18-19). Paul and James were together with other apostles in the council that ruled on Gentile circumcision (Acts 15; Galatians 1-2), and they again conferred when Paul brought Gentile welfare funds to Jerusalem (Acts 21:17-26). Such documented dialogues with Peter and James are behind Paul's mid-century letters that closely reflect Christ's teachings on the Galilean mount (Matthew 5-7) and Christ's extended prophecy on the Mount of Olives (Matthew 24). Commenting on the "impressive list of parallels" between the Sermon on the Mount

and Romans 12–13, respected scholar F. F. Bruce added, “While none of our canonical Gospels existed at this time, the teaching of Christ recorded in them was current among the churches—certainly in oral form, and perhaps also in the form of written summaries.”⁶

Sources behind the Four Gospels

Authentic biographies recapture early years with oral history interviews or find various written records. An early-second-century Christian tells us that Mark is basically oral history and that Matthew incorporates early written records. The source is one Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, which anciently was in the Roman province of Asia, now western Turkey. Roughly a hundred miles to the west stood Ephesus, the famous coastal city where Paul labored three years and where several Christian sources place the apostle John in his later years. A number of fragments of Papias’s writings survive, showing that he searched for surviving memories of Jesus, but his extant writings give something equally valuable—what ancient Christians then knew about the origins of the Gospels of Matthew and Mark. Papias gave his source as “the elder John,” which I think was the aged apostle because other historical references to this period make that identification, as will be discussed. Papias included “the elder John” among “the Lord’s disciples,” in a context applying that phrase to the Jerusalem Twelve.⁷

6. F. F. Bruce, *The Letter of Paul to the Romans*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1985), 212–13, cited in Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Paul’s Witness to the Historical Integrity of the Gospels,” in *Sperry Symposium Classics: The New Testament*, ed. Frank F. Judd Jr. and Gaye Strathearn (Salt Lake City: BYU Religious Studies Center and Deseret Book, 2006), 223. For detailed parallels of the teachings of Jesus in Paul, see pp. 217–27.

7. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.3–4, trans. Kirsopp Lake (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953), 292–93, with *elder* substituted here and in other quotations for Lake’s untranslated *presbyter*. Eusebius (ca. AD 260–ca. AD 340), bishop of Caesarea and the first major church historian, possessed a Palestinian manuscript collection and quotes materials not preserved elsewhere. In this contested passage, Papias states he preserved what the first disciples said, including John, and what present disciples are saying, “Aristion and the elder John,” which I take to mean that Papias had earlier quotations from the apostle John and current quotations also. Eusebius thinks the passage speaks of two Christian leaders named John, but good evidence is lacking for a second prominent John in that area.

The point is that Papias is relaying information from a survivor of the generation that was familiar with the origins of the four Gospels.

Papias said he had reliably learned the following: “Matthew collected the oracles in the Hebrew language, and each one interpreted them as he could.”⁸ Here *oracles* translates a term clearly meaning “sacred words,” which indicates that the converted tax recorder (Matthew 9:9) also recorded the teachings of the Lord. But that compilation was written in the language of Palestinian Jews, probably Aramaic, so it was not easily translated when the gospel first went to the Greek world, which took place by AD 40. Thus Matthew’s Aramaic compilation was much earlier than the present Gospel, written later for the Mediterranean world in Greek, with Greek translations of Hebraic terms.

Luke’s preface concisely explains that his information came from “the eyewitnesses, and ministers of the word,” a double reference to the apostles chosen by Christ who then presided over the Mediterranean church. As Paul’s traveling companion, Luke learned what Paul knew about Jesus and talked with other apostles and early disciples. Moreover, Luke was a doctor (Colossians 4:14) with observable literary skill and who perhaps made notes in anticipation of presenting Christ’s life to the Greco-Roman world, where he was clearly at home. Luke’s stated methods (Luke 1:1–3) and the quality of his work well equal that of the most respected Roman and Greek historians, so I think that revisionary scholars are arbitrary in rejecting the claim of careful historical presentation expressed in Luke’s preface. The criterion of apostolic eyewitnesses also appears in the Papias report of how Mark’s Gospel came to be. Just before his Matthew comment, Papias explained that “the elder John” described that Mark traveled with Peter (1 Peter 5:13), translated Peter’s recollections of what Jesus said and did, and accurately recorded Peter’s narratives in this shortest, most vivid of the above three Gospels, which are labeled “synoptic” because they have a “similar view” chronicling the life of Jesus.⁹

8. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.16, 1:297. The comment on Matthew immediately follows the quotation about Mark, which begins, “And the elder used to say this,” referring to “the elder John,” an introduction that contextually carries over to the Matthew statement. After *as*, I have deleted *best*, which is not in the Greek text.

9. Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 3.39.14–15; see also 2.15.1–2.

My final New Testament chain of information concerns the Gospel of John, which differs from the other three Gospels by including many conversations and teachings of Christ that are not in the synoptic story. As indicated, several early church fathers speak of the apostle John's late residence in the large city of Ephesus. Traceable details come from Irenaeus (ca. AD 130–ca. AD 200), bishop of Lyons, in present France. As a boy Irenaeus lived north of Ephesus, in Smyrna, modern Izmir in western Turkey. The bishop there was Polycarp, martyred in AD 155 at age 86. Irenaeus vividly remembered how Polycarp described associating “with John and with the others who had seen the Lord, how he remembered their words, and what were the things concerning the Lord which he had heard from them.”¹⁰ Irenaeus heard Polycarp and clearly understood that Polycarp referred to the aging apostle John. Polycarp spoke of knowing “those who were conversant in Asia with John, the disciple of the Lord.” Irenaeus said this was one of the Twelve, stating that “John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.” Thus “John the disciple of the Lord,” referred to repeatedly by Irenaeus, is the John whose name is on the Gospel. Irenaeus elsewhere informs readers that the apostle John remained at Ephesus “until the times of Trajan” (AD 98–117),¹¹ which means this Gospel may have originated as late as the early second century. John's Gospel seems to assume that readers know the basics of Christ's life, which suggests it was written after the other three.

In review, each Gospel is based on primary or traceable secondary information. The synoptic Gospels tap three significant sources. These Gospels are independent of each other and yet broadly blend in reporting Christ's teachings, miracles, prophecies, suffering, and resurrection. Though these Gospels were composed later, they reach back to Matthew's early compilation of Jesus's teachings, Peter's recollections, and Luke's interviews of “eyewitnesses.” So the synoptic authors

10. Irenaeus, letter to Florinus, in Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical History* 5.20.6, 1:496–99.

11. Irenaeus quotations, in order of appearance, are in *Against Heresies*, 2.22.5; 3.1.1; 3.3.4, in *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, ed. Alexander Robertson and James Donaldson (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981).

based their biographies on written and oral information from the generation that walked with Christ. In 1 Corinthians, Paul adds a fourth transmission of early information, producing a mini-Gospel that reiterates what he was told by apostles about the close of Christ's ministry and his resurrection. All this is far more than historical hearsay or general tradition, both of which claim to transmit history but only from unidentified sources. In the case of the synoptic Gospels and 1 Corinthians, information is relayed from identified and informed observers. Finally, John's Gospel is a firsthand account, obviously the last surviving apostle's most valued memories of the Master. It preserves data from the end of the apostolic age. The late-second-century bishop Irenaeus reported hearing the earlier bishop Polycarp, who repeated what he had learned by associating with "John and with the others who had seen the Lord."

Thus Irenaeus adds external data to the internal evidence of authorship of the Fourth Gospel: "According to John" stands at the beginning of innumerable copies of that Gospel, the earliest known dating to about AD 200 and linking with the close of Irenaeus's life.¹² "Which John" is answered by the Gospel's closing chapter, informing readers that the author is the disciple who leaned on the Savior's breast at the Last Supper (John 21:20–24). There was but one John among the original Twelve at this final feast. Thus the Fourth Gospel comes from the apostle John, who writes with slight indirection at the end, "We know that his testimony is true" (John 21:24). When *we* appears in such interjected comments in that Gospel, it is the editorial *we*, a self-effacing but clear assertion of first-person experience. Thus John's Gospel opens with the theme of intimate, personal observation: "And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). Moreover, the same apostle began his first letter with a powerful authentication of Christ's resurrection: "That which

12. The early copy mentioned is the near-complete Bodmer Papyrus II (P⁶⁶) and associated fragments. For description and date, see the Nestle-Aland *Novum Testamentum Graece*, rev. 27th ed. (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1993), 687, with all variant headings naming John at p. 247.

was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life” (1 John 1:1).

Christ’s miraculous resurrection certifies that he accomplished the miraculous atonement. Every Gospel describes how he deliberately submitted to arrest the night before the crucifixion. Probably because the synoptic Gospels so well summarized Christ’s life and teachings, the apostle John could write a virtual appendix to what was known, devoting over a third of his space to the final week and the Savior’s explanations of his coming death. The last temple teaching in John prefigured Gethsemane, for Jesus prayed openly to be spared from the coming hour yet closed that petition by conceding that for life-giving death “came I unto this hour” (John 12:23–24, 27). Christ then testified that by being “lifted up” he would “draw all men unto me” (John 12:32–33). Jesus openly proclaimed that his greatest mission was “to save the world” (John 12:47), and within days he gave the apostles symbols of his atoning suffering and death: broken bread for his body and wine for his blood, which Jesus clearly said would be shed for the sins “of many” (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:19). He defined the highest standard of love, “that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13), and personally maintained that standard of selflessness to the end. On investigation, details of this divine life came from those commissioned at the end to preach worldwide, baptize, and teach the converted “all things whatsoever I have commanded you” (Matthew 28:19–20; Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:46–47). Could literate Christian founders imagine fulfilling this charge without written records about the life, teachings, and triumph of the Son of God?

Joseph Smith as a Prophet

I have used *probing* in regard to the Gospels because knowing Christ starts with the trustworthiness of the books that document his life. In the case of Joseph Smith, however, there are abundant early sources, so *probing* here applies more to selecting materials that best

illuminate his claims as a prophet, especially finding what those observers nearest him say. Before presenting materials that impress me positively about Joseph Smith, I would like to comment on whether believing historians ignore what is negative. The answer is partly that the LDS Church and independent LDS scholars are attempting to publish and analyze all available sources about the Mormon founder, whether perceived as positive or negative. For decades researchers have cast a wide net for materials in collections in and beyond Salt Lake City and Independence, Missouri. The Joseph Smith Papers Project stemmed from increasingly careful cataloguing and greater knowledge of and access to relevant sources during my lifetime. This immense LDS project brings together numerous full-time and other contributing scholars with the goal of editing all known documents produced by or received by Joseph Smith. My disclaimer is that I do not make policy nor speak for the church. But already the openness has been remarkable, and I understand that the only things to be withheld from publication are redundant materials—repetitious financial records, for instance. Ultimately, primary sources of everything Joseph Smith spoke, wrote, or dictated should be in this collection, which will pack several thousand documents into more than two dozen categorized volumes. Sources will be quality controlled by professional standards of text and commentary, with nationally recognized scholars included on the board of review. I am proud of a church that is willing to publicly share its archives and allow the world to see its founding prophet without stage props and without censoring his expressions. The commitment in time and resources is really astounding and could not be sustained without the initial aid of the late Larry H. Miller and the continuing support of his companion, Gail, and their children.

This avalanche of available Joseph Smith materials compels true scholars of every persuasion to be better informed on Joseph Smith sources. Lower judges strive to be accurate in their legal interpretations and avoid the embarrassment of reversal by appellate courts. I have always hoped that my historical work would stand the test of review, that is, the test of conclusions backed up by documents of the time, perceptively interpreted. History written by that method may be

supplemented but not reversed, because nothing can erase primary and responsible secondary sources on which it is based. As a historian of early Mormonism, I now have access to virtually all surviving sources, and only lack of industry or empathy can limit my understanding of Joseph Smith. What he became is huge in contrast to his limitations, which are mortal and understandable. The following issues convince me that this founding prophet was called and inspired of God in his lifetime mission.

Joseph Smith's First Vision

Whether or not one accepts the answer to Joseph Smith's first vocal prayer, Joseph should have credit for clearly framing one of the great religious questions of all time. His simple eloquence on the confusion of competing religions should deeply touch every sensitive person. As a young Mormon missionary, I retold that story to hundreds, and most at least listened with some degree of interest. Yet biographer Brodie dismisses Joseph's experience in the grove as "the elaboration of some half-remembered dream stimulated by the early revival excitement," or "it may have been sheer invention" to strengthen his prophetic career.¹³ This is a classic example of cheating on the outcome by silently limiting the possibilities, for Mrs. Brodie writes from a sophisticated plateau that is above the issue of whether a real God could appear to anyone. Yet a deity of power and concern could give someone a profound answer to this universal question, and the claimed answer requires a test far different from quibbling about the ages that Joseph vaguely remembered in different accounts of the First Vision.

Every converted Latter-day Saint knows that public revelation may be validated by private revelation—that God spiritually vindicates the word he has given by his Spirit (Moroni 10:4). Though this dimension is beyond the modern academic curriculum, the truly educated person should be aware of this additional insight, which is a major test of the First Vision. As a high school sophomore, I thoughtfully

13. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd ed. (New York: Knopf, 1971), 25.

read Joseph Smith's account in the Pearl of Great Price and strongly felt this was an actual experience told by an honest man. This was a distinct religious experience but also a personal reaction to unsophisticated narrative, for reading had long been my hobby. Arthur Henry King confronted this account as a seasoned literature and linguistics professor with international scholarly experience. He reflected that Joseph Smith's unstudied, straightforward words "deeply impressed" him, explaining: "He is not trying to make me cry or feel ecstatic. That struck me . . . for I could see that this man was telling the truth."¹⁴

Two objections have persisted against the First Vision, both pseudo-historical. The first is ironic, for early critics discredited the First Vision because of arbitrary limits on memory. The only well-known account was dictated eighteen years after the event; this is the record in the Pearl of Great Price, which is taken from the opening of Joseph Smith's manuscript history. More careful research turned up earlier accounts, principally one written in Joseph Smith's handwriting in late 1832. These earlier reports gave believers new details but critics more words to dissect, with a resulting theory that the story grew in retelling. Joseph Smith's defenders pointed out other possibilities, for instance, that additional aspects of the original experience came out in later accounts. Joseph's handwritten 1832 history enriched our understanding by describing how "the Lord" appeared to him, assured him of forgiveness through his atonement for mankind, informed him that no religious organization was his, and stated that he would come in glory.¹⁵ Though Joseph's report focused on the appearance and words of Christ, it by no means denied that the Father had appeared. Taking a part for the whole is a standard logical error, and historical sources often describe a vivid part of the picture without perspective on the broader interrelated events.

The problem is that Joseph Smith didn't spell out all the details in any one account. I'm a married man, and when I come home tired and

14. Arthur Henry King, *The Abundance of the Heart* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 200–201.

15. The account is transcribed in Dean C. Jessee, *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 9–14.

my wife asks me a question, sometimes I don't spell out all the details. Then I get a second and a third question because my wife is analytical enough that she would really like the full story and not a piece of it. But in every account, whether it's my son, Nathan, giving me graduation reminiscences today, or whether you think back to something significant that happened on your wedding day, when have you sat down and written the whole story? It's going to be a part of the story no matter what. And that's the intrinsic problem with Joseph's testimonies of the First Vision.

However, that possibility does not prevent some from claiming that describing the Son rules out a previous sequence of seeing the Father. So Mrs. Brodie upgraded her "half-remembered dream" to an "evolutionary fantasy," claiming "that 'the Lord' of the first version became two 'personages'" as Joseph related his experience afterward.¹⁶

Those who think deeply may be victimized by intellectual tunnel vision. The best historians retain perspective of all sources while studying a single source. In the familiar Pearl of Great Price account, Christ alone responded to Joseph's prayer after being introduced by the Father (JS—H 1:17). Most Latter-day Saints know that Joseph later defended his experience by saying, "I saw two Personages, and they did in reality speak to me" (v. 25), but in early printings the next phrase in the manuscript—"or one of them did"—was lost.¹⁷ To me this suggests that Christ was most vivid in Joseph's mind in 1832 as the one answering his question, though later retellings gave broader perspective to the whole experience.

The other main negative claim against the First Vision is also historically wanting because it oversimplifies Joseph Smith's story and then refutes the simplification. Reverend Wesley Walters died probably believing that he had disproved Joseph's First Vision story because he so well documented spectacular religious conversions in Palmyra during 1824 and 1825. The oversimplification emerged when he made a point of finding no evidence of such religious activity in Palmyra just before 1820, when Joseph Smith dated the First Vision (JS—H 1:14).

16. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 409; "Supplement" in 2nd edition.

17. Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 232.

By contrast, Brigham Young University professor Milton V. Backman Jr. showed that critics were not careful in reading the Pearl of Great Price account, which did not mention one localized revival but a sustained “unusual excitement” with the most substantial conversions not in the Palmyra area but in “the whole district of country” (v. 5).¹⁸ Yet a Walters associate still thinks that “the excitement of religion that Joseph Smith mentioned in his official account was the Palmyra revival of 1824–25.”¹⁹ However, according to Joseph Smith’s handwritten 1832 history, such a conclusion is based on looking for the wrong thing in the wrong time period. Even the Pearl of Great Price account shows that Joseph Smith had been investigating churches over a “process of time” (v. 8). But Joseph’s 1832 report states that his period of confusion lasted “from the age of twelve years to fifteen,” which would extend from December 23, 1817, to December 23, 1820.²⁰

These broad brackets mean that Joseph was intensely searching during the years 1818 and 1819, up to early 1820, the time of the First Vision (JS—H 1:14). We now know that a large Methodist camp meeting was held near Palmyra during June 19–23, 1818. This is found in the diary of Aurora Seager, a young circuit rider who left entries concerning these dates: “On the 19th I attended a camp-meeting at Palmyra. The arrival of Bishop Roberts, who seems to be a man of God and is apostolic in his appearance, gave a deeper interest to the meeting until it closed. On Monday the sacrament was administered; about twenty were baptized; forty united with the Church, and the meeting closed.”²¹ The harvest of forty new Methodists indicates an estimated crowd of at least 400 on the campground, with saturated sermons during five days from the visiting Methodist bishop and about a dozen senior preachers, all declaring to a largely unchurched

18. See Milton V. Backman Jr., *Joseph Smith’s First Vision*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), 79–80; and Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Testimony of the First Vision,” *Ensign*, April 1996, 15–16.

19. H. Michael Marquardt, *The Rise of Mormonism: 1816–1844* (Longwood, FL: Xulon, 2005), 639.

20. Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 10.

21. Aurora’s diary was extensively copied in Reverend E. Latimer, *The Three Brothers: Sketches of the Lives of Rev. Aurora Seager, Rev. Micah Seager, Rev. Schuyler Seager, D. D.* (New York, 1880), 21–22, microfiche at Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University.

crowd the need for Christ and personal repentance. None in the small village of Palmyra and vicinity would be ignorant of this great gathering for that area, broadly coinciding with the family's settlement on their farm. According to Joseph, in that period an unusual religious excitement arose with the Methodists (JS—H 1:5), and the 1818 Palmyra camp meeting shows that his recollection had a factual basis.

The Book of Mormon Witnesses

An early revelation promised the Three Witnesses a view of the plates with the command that they should testify of their experience so “that my servant Joseph Smith, Jun., may not be destroyed,” and also so that God’s latter-day purposes should be fulfilled (Doctrine and Covenants 17:4). It is a huge step from an individual assertion to a group verification. In 1947 our mission plan devoted the second lesson to the testimony of the Three Witnesses, that they had seen an angel displaying the plates while they heard a divine voice certifying the translation as correct. That lesson also covered the testimony of the Eight Witnesses, that in an ordinary situation they had lifted the metallic record and turned its engraved leaves. In law school I was motivated to learn more about these eleven men who had signed formal statements on the above experiences and had freely answered questions. Church literature then contained many reports of talking with these eleven witnesses. Realizing that their statements were of primary importance in verifying Joseph Smith’s mission, I resolved to locate all surviving, original documents pertaining to these witnesses, whether in Latter-day Saint archives, what is now Community of Christ archives, and libraries specializing in Mormon collections or among descendants and other private sources.

What began as a serious hobby turned into decades of research, and I now have files on more than two hundred occasions when a Book of Mormon witness responded to a question or many questions about his experience with the plates. These are in the form of statements or conversations, and contact with witnesses was made during Joseph Smith’s lifetime or even several decades later, since Martin Harris, John Whitmer, and David Whitmer lived until the last quarter of the

nineteenth century. Most interviewers were believers in the Book of Mormon, mainly Latter-day Saints or Reorganized Latter Day Saints, but many were essentially disinterested bystanders, such as newspaper reporters. Most of these contacts with the Book of Mormon witnesses have now been published, often in abbreviated form, but my files contain a number of unpublished interviews and are essentially a master archive on the subject.²² Included as “interviews” are written reaffirmations by Martin Harris, David Whitmer, Hyrum Smith, and John Whitmer. These accounts are often brief but move up to detailed interrogations. Many reports, especially from the Eight Witnesses, are simple affirmations that their written testimonies in the Book of Mormon are accurate.²³ By contrast, David Whitmer outlived all the witnesses and allowed detailed conversation up to his death in 1888. So we can reconstruct a comprehensive session with him, merging many questions and answers from several recorded dialogues.²⁴ Finally, as the last surviving witness, David corrected false reports that claimed that he or any other witness had denied or modified his written testimony.²⁵ Just before their deaths, each of the Three Witnesses finally reiterated his printed testimony of the Book of Mormon. Though each of the Three Witnesses had strong policy differences with Joseph Smith at some point, they never varied from their written testimony and repeated statements that they had seen the glorious angel who showed them the plates while they heard the divine voice declaring the translation of the Book of Mormon as correct.

To share a feeling for ongoing discovery, I have obtained permission from collector Brent Ashworth to share William E. McLellin’s report of his conversation with Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer

22. The fairly complete collection of David Whitmer statements is in Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991). For mixtures of reports and surveys of interviews with all eleven witnesses, see Dan Vogel’s five-volume collection titled *Early Mormon Documents*, though I disagree with many interpretations.

23. See Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Attempts to Redefine the Experience of the Eight Witnesses of the Book of Mormon,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14/1 (2005): 18–31.

24. Richard Lloyd Anderson, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1981), 80–82.

25. David Whitmer, *An Address to All Believers in Christ* (Richmond, MO, 1887), 8.

during the Jackson County mobbings in 1833. McLellin was converted in 1831 after hearing the Book of Mormon testimonies of witnesses David Whitmer and Hyrum Smith. Chosen an apostle in 1835, he was later affected by the counter-Joseph Smith movement in 1837–1838, when he was replaced as an apostle (D&C 118:1). Active in dissident movements after that, he held fast to the Book of Mormon and for some years sought unsuccessfully to rebuild the church around the surviving Book of Mormon witnesses. Before his death in 1883, he explained many of his doctrinal positions in well-written notebooks, most of which have been published.²⁶ But a missing 1871 notebook was recently acquired by Brent Ashworth and contains McLellin’s original handwritten recollection of confronting Oliver Cowdery and David Whitmer soon after Bishop Partridge had been tarred and feathered in 1833. The armed old citizens were then hunting for Cowdery and McLellin, who met with David Whitmer in the woods near the Whitmer settlement west of Independence. McLellin here recalls his questions and their answers:

I said to them, “brethren I never have seen an open vision in my life, but you men say you have, and therefore you positively know. Now you know that our lives are in danger every hour, if the mob can only catch us. Tell me in the fear of God, is that book of Mormon true”? Cowdery looked at me with solemnity depicted in his face, and said, “Brother William, God sent his holy Angel to declare the truth of the translation of it to us, and therefore we know. And though the mob kill us, yet we must die declaring its truth.” David said, “Oliver has told you the solemn truth, for we could not be deceived. I most truly declare to you its truth!!” Said I, boys I believe you. I can see no object for you to tell me falsehood now, when our lives are endangered.²⁷

26. See Stan Larson and Samuel J. Passey, *The William E. McLellin Papers* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2007), which includes an early copy of the McLellin narrative discussed here, though the original notebook had not been located at that time.

27. “W. E. McLellan’s Book Jan. 4th 1871,” 166–67; punctuation and underlining follows the manuscript, with McLellin’s occasional strikeouts not duplicated here (see

Observing a Sacred Influence around Joseph

We now move to a topic on the edge of physical sight, the altered appearance of Joseph Smith when he was translating, dictating revelation, or speaking by inspiration. This was widely observed, though everyone present may not have seen it. Those who describe an altered appearance were believers, as far as I know, raising the possibility that an individual spiritual discernment is involved. The most spectacular Latter-day Saint parallel is the broadly reported “transfiguration” of Brigham Young before he was sustained as successor to Joseph Smith.²⁸ Of course, Joseph Smith was observed in daily life as an ordinary mortal, so I hope not to contribute to an artistic convention of surrounding him with a halo. Yet the scriptures contain accounts when special divine power brought a visible whiteness to a servant of God. For instance, when the martyr Stephen bore a final testimony, even his judges “saw his face as it had been the face of an angel” (Acts 6:15). From time to time Joseph Smith possessed not only the gift of prophecy but also the gift of visible spiritual anointing while filling his prophetic calling.

My first example is the experience of Sally Heller Conrad Bunnell, who died in Provo, Utah, in 1903. Oliver Huntington met her at an old-folks outing in 1897 and told her story in his diary as follows:

I conversed with one old lady eighty-eight years old who lived with David Whitmer when Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery were translating the Book of Mormon in the upper room of the house, and she, only a girl, saw them come down from the translating room several [times], when they looked so exceedingly white and strange that she inquired of Mrs. Whitmer

also *McLellin Papers*, 254). McLellin varied the spelling of the last syllable of his name. The Three Witnesses’ written testimony states that God’s voice declared the translation inspired and commanded them to bear record of it. The angel might have reinforced this divine message, or McLellin may have misunderstood who gave the message.

28. See Lynne Watkins Jorgensen, “The Mantle of the Prophet Joseph Passes to Brother Brigham: One Hundred Twenty-one Testimonies of a Collective Spiritual Witness,” in *Opening the Heavens*, ed. John W. Welch with Erick B. Carlson (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2005), 373–480.

the cause of their unusual appearance, but Mrs. Whitmer was unwilling to tell the hired girl, the true cause as it was a sacred holy event connected with a holy sacred work which [was] opposed and persecuted by nearly every one who heard of it. The girl . . . finally told Mrs. Whi[t]mer that she would not stay with her unless she knew the cause of the strange looks of these men. Sister Whitmer then told her what the men were doing in the room above. . . . This satisfied the girl and opened the way to embracing the gospel. She is the mother of Stephen Bunnell of Provo, and the Bunnell family of Provo.²⁹

Years ago I learned that Sally's surviving granddaughter lived in the Provo area and had told this story to a group, so I asked my wife if she could work an interview into her busy schedule. Carma took my student assistant, Kristen Bowman, to record this interview with Pearl Bunnell Newell. Pearl, whose mind was very clear, said she was sixteen when she stayed with her grandmother about 1900, and Sally Bunnell told her this story of seeing the translators in the Whitmer home: "They would go up in the attic and stay there all day and she said that when they would come down that they would look more like heavenly beings than they did men." What Sally told her granddaughter closely fits what she told Oliver Huntington about the same time, but the granddaughter added that Mrs. Whitmer finally cautioned her hired girl "to keep all of these things secret on the account of persecution." Thus two different people who heard Sally recall her 1829 experience gave equivalent accounts.³⁰

Joseph Smith's associates related that divine inspiration was often visible upon him. Brigham Young said, "He preached by the Spirit of revelation, and taught in his council by it, and those who were acquainted with him could discover it at once, for at such times there

29. Oliver B. Huntington, journal 2, typescript, Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU, 412.

30. Carma De [de] Jong Anderson, Pearl Bunnell Newell Oral History Interview (January 1970), Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, BYU. Glimpses of her mental clarity appear in her obituary, Provo *Daily Herald*, 21 September 1975. Some sources have a single *l* at the end of *Bunnell*.

was a peculiar clearness and transparency in his face.”³¹ Heber C. Kimball said that Joseph was “one of the most lovely men I ever saw, especially when the Spirit of God was in him, and his countenance was as white as the whitest thing you ever saw.”³² Orson Pratt said he was present in June 1831 when Doctrine and Covenants 54 was given, commanding the Colesville Branch to move from Ohio to Missouri: “Joseph was as calm as the morning sun. But he noticed a change in his countenance that he had never noticed before. When a revelation was given to him, Joseph’s face was exceedingly white, and seemed to shine.”³³ These biblical marks of divine presence came in greatest power on the Savior (Mark 9:3) but were given from time to time to the great Prophet of the Restoration, evidenced by discourses of leaders but occasionally mentioned in journals and recollections of the lesser known.

The Significance of Carthage

Because Joseph Smith’s prophetic premonitions of martyrdom are impressive, I wrote an article on this subject.³⁴ I begin with an additional source to lay groundwork for the looming events of Carthage. William Swartzell was converted in Ohio and journeyed to Missouri to learn more about Joseph Smith and the Mormon gathering. He stayed in Missouri the summer of 1838 and kept a short journal, which records the brief tragedy of a man who couldn’t handle what Elder Maxwell called discipleship. One cause was his terror at signs of upcoming hostilities between expanding Mormon settlements and

31. *Journal of Discourses*, 9:89.

32. *Journal of Discourses*, 6:35.

33. “Two Days’ Meeting at Brigham City, June 27 and 28, 1874,” *Ogden Junction*, in *Millennial Star* 36 (11 August 1874): 498. I have changed punctuation to transfer “when revelation was given to him” to the following sentence, which avoids the implication that Joseph’s change of form was singular for Pratt. Like Brigham Young, Orson said this was periodically observable: “I saw his countenance lighted up as the inspiration of the Holy Ghost rested upon him, dictating the great and most precious revelations now printed for our guide” (*Journal of Discourses*, 7:176).

34. Richard Lloyd Anderson, “Joseph Smith’s Prophecies of Martyrdom,” in *A Sesquicentennial Look at Church History: Sidney B. Sperry Symposium, January 26, 1980* (Religious Instruction, BYU, 1980), 1–14.

old residents, who were determined to keep Mormons in one county. Swartzell changed course and returned to Ohio, where he published his journal a short time later. It summarizes Joseph Smith's sermon at the end of July, a week before Mormons fought for their right to vote at the Gallatin election. Swartzell reported that Joseph "preached on prophecy," seemingly mentioned the First Vision, and concluded that his safety was secondary to the cause of the gospel: "I know that all the world is threatening my life; but I regard it not, for I am willing to die at any time when God calls for me."³⁵

We now advance Joseph's story to final imprisonment. Despite repeated letters to the governor that Carthage spelled death, he submitted to arrest on the charge of riot in ordering the suppression of the opposition newspaper, went to Carthage, posted bail, was rearrested on a questionable charge of treason, and was kept in jail for a hearing canceled because of his murder. Historians face contradictions between rumors outside of Carthage Jail and Joseph's plans inside of it. On martyrdom morning Joseph apparently had no plan to escape, jotting personal feelings at the end of a note to Emma: "I am very much resigned to my lot knowing I am Justified and have done the best that could be done."³⁶ At midday Dan Jones was entrusted with a letter asking attorney Orville Browning to represent Joseph at the treason hearing in two days, and Jones nervously rode through a crowd boiling with rumors, one of which accused him of carrying "orders for the Nauvoo Legion to come there to save the prisoners." Such speculation may have been behind the hearsay in the journal of Nauvoo Legion officer Allen Stout, who wrote that "Joseph wrote an official order to Jonathan Dunham to bring the legion and rescue him,"³⁷ adding that Dunham kept this to himself. Stout did not give his source, and Mark Hofmann even forged such an order, which influenced at least

35. William Swartzell, *Mormonism Exposed* (Pekin, OH: author, 1840), 27. The quotation continues with Joseph's survey of persecutions he had endured.

36. Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 27 June 1844, in Jessee, *Personal Writings*, 630, with facsimile at 630–31.

37. See references and full discussion in Richard Lloyd Anderson, "Christian Ethics in Joseph Smith Biography," in *Expressions of Faith*, ed. Susan Easton Black (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 164–69.

one historian to give Dunham undeserved credit for avoiding major bloodshed.³⁸

It was Joseph Smith, however, who saved countless lives by offering his own. In Carthage Jail, John Taylor and other close associates discussed options. Taylor strongly felt that the law had been manipulated unjustly and asked Joseph for authority to compel his release. Elder Taylor later wrote: “My idea was to go to Nauvoo, and collect a force sufficient,” but he added, “Brother Joseph refused.”³⁹ Two days before he was assassinated, Joseph wrote to Emma that Nauvoo’s citizens should “continue placid pacific & prayerful.” On the morning of his death, Joseph wrote her again, cautiously stating that self-defense was an innate right, but that Governor Ford would come to Nauvoo on a peaceful mission, and therefore she should tell acting commander Dunham “to instruct the people to stay at home and attend to their own business” unless summoned to a public meeting by the governor.⁴⁰

Of course, only Christ had atoning power in suffering and dying. But Joseph’s death was sacrificial in the sense that he, like Christ, did “lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13). As Elder Maxwell clearly explained, Jesus said his disciples would be known by the high standard of loving others “as I have loved you” (13:34–35). Like various divine callings in life, various paths test true disciples in death. Joseph Smith proved his utter sincerity by turning back from a temporary western exile in order to lessen the risk to Nauvoo from bigoted vengeance. Trusted secretary William Clayton explained Joseph’s

38. D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy: Origins of Power* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994), 141, cites the forged Dunham order from Jesse’s 1984 original edition of *Personal Writings of Joseph Smith*. However, Hofmann’s forgeries became widely known by his plea bargain in early 1987 and the release of transcripts of the prison interviews later that year. For specific counterfeit characteristics of the Dunham order, see Linda Sillitoe and Allen Roberts, *Salamander: The Story of the Mormon Forgery Murders*, 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1989), 561.

39. John Taylor, “The Martyrdom of Joseph Smith,” Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City, Utah, published in *History of the Church*, ed. B. H. Roberts (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1932), 7:100.

40. Quotations are from Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 25 June 1844, and Joseph Smith to Emma Smith, 27 June 1844, both transcribed with facsimiles in Jesse, *Personal Writings*, 620, 629–30.

surrender to arrest on the day he rode to Carthage: “He expects nothing but to be massacred . . . but there appearing no alternative but he must either give himself up or the city be massacred by a lawless mob under the sanction of the governor.”⁴¹ As Joseph built Nauvoo, he built a trained legion for protection, equal to the numbers unlawfully assembling in Carthage and far superior to them in training. When Joseph’s final crisis came, the Nauvoo Legion could have saved his life. Latter-day Saints would have given their lives for the prophet. But he gave his life for them.

Military, Intellectual, and Spiritual Intelligence

In World War II, Elder Maxwell served on Okinawa. His mortar position was nearly fatally targeted, but he was divinely protected when the shelling unexpectedly ceased.⁴² Hugh Nibley served in army intelligence in Europe. He told me that just before the Battle of the Bulge, he went to his superiors with close predictions of when and where the German counterattack would begin, but his warning was ignored. His careful biography gives the sequel: Hugh was soon transferred, but within days his replacements were killed when a shell hit their building.⁴³ My service career was not as dramatic. I had long months of training as a radio-gunner in naval aircraft, and many unusual delays enabled intense gospel study for a planned mission. I had strong assurance that I would live to complete that mission. Though I never saw action, I was also guided in my service career, as many will agree who know my contributions to the postwar system of gospel presentation for nonmembers. The Navy assigned me to a search-and-rescue plane, the long-range PBY Catalina, identifiable as amphibious with over a hundred-foot wingspan and a cruising speed of only about 130 miles per hour. For offense, it was effective in anti-submarine warfare and

41. William Clayton, Journal, 24 June 1844, Church History Library. See also James B. Allen, *No Toil Nor Labor Fear: The Story of William Clayton* (Provo, UT: BYU Press, 2002), 135.

42. See Bruce C. Hafen, *A Disciple’s Life* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 109–10, which includes impressive phrases from Elder Maxwell’s patriarchal blessing.

43. Boyd Jay Petersen, *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Greg Kofford Books, 2002), 201–2.

in reconnaissance. These planes sighted Japanese fleet groups coming from different directions at the beginning of the Battle of Midway, a major turning point in the Pacific campaigns.

My point is that intelligence wins battles. Those who deciphered radio messages were as much responsible for military success as the people who fought. Japanese codes were partially cracked before the Battle of Midway. Some of you know this part of the story. Decipherers anticipated a major attack, but some were not sure of the target. So a deceptive message was sent that the island of Midway was almost out of water, and then they monitored the Japanese reaction, which confirmed their suspicion. Success in combat depends on preparation, including serious strategies to learn what is coming. In fact, this principle applies to life itself—some sense of the future is required to make the present significant. In Nibley's case, surprised generals soon appeared in his makeshift situation room to examine the updated maps of German positions. The equivalent for Latter-day Saints is their collection of comprehensive scriptures, together with continuing prophetic declarations that may become scripture.

My life has been one among many devoted to understanding and reporting words and deeds of important religious founders. My teaching load first included Roman and Greek history and western civilization to the Renaissance. After a decade I centered on the New Testament and the early church, with a class on the Book of Mormon witnesses, and continued writing on early Christianity and Joseph Smith. My major goal has been to get the story straight, with publishing as a by-product. While I was in law school, a New England mission president accurately told his missionaries that I got results by persistence, not brilliance. The years have produced large files of primary and responsible secondary information on these fields, reflecting the ambition to compile what eyewitnesses said about crucial beginnings of ancient Christianity and its modern counterpart founded by the Prophet Joseph Smith. Speaking for myself and not in judgment of others, it is academic cowardice to chronicle the lives of Jesus and Joseph Smith without really grappling with what meant most to each—the reality of and preparation for the world to come. For some it

may be professional etiquette to avoid discussing the “truth claims” of the above religious founders. Although that divided approach is necessary in publicly financed classrooms, one of my liberties in a private university is the right not only to describe these founders’ lives but also to evaluate the credibility of their claims.

In the words of the courtroom oath, secular education tells current truth but not the whole truth. So I would not be honest about Christ or Joseph Smith without telling you how I feel after decades of studying, reflecting, and discoursing on their lives. I would speak as a whole person, both the academic investigator of historical events and a lifetime seeker of religious truth. Sir Francis Bacon supposedly said that writing produced an exact man. The disciplined historical method has made me a careful man in my religious thinking. In turn my religion has given me the highest standards of honesty. Mind and soul dictate that I mislead none, nor make empty claims of knowledge. Mind and soul also emphasize the moral duty to publicize momentous information. Our criminal law is generally based on a public sense of morality. A sanity hearing deals with some definition of responsible thinking or action, adapting the legal tradition of whether the subject knows the difference between right and wrong.

Do I know the difference between a fraud and a true prophet? I think I do. And I think I qualify as an expert witness in my work as a broad Christian historian, with certification in ancient, medieval, and reformation fields and specialization in New Testament history and Joseph Smith biography. Based on a life of persistent study of ancient and modern religions, and by every rule of evidence that I know, Christ and Joseph Smith are what they claimed to be. That is my considered professional opinion.

At this point the apostle Paul would ask, Is that all? He spoke of “the wisdom of men” and “the wisdom of God,” leaving no doubt as to which was more important (1 Corinthians 2:5–7). Considering his goal of deflating Corinthian egotism, Paul might agree that these dual wisdoms become one to the truly humble. So I must add my partial but clear experience with “the wisdom of God.” The common principles of Christ and ancient and modern prophets are workable and, when

lived, bring me highest happiness. As discussed, it is mindless to live in this world without regard for divine intelligence on what will happen after death. The apostolic call to live for immortal glory rings true in my soul. Sustained prayers in Christ's name have brought immediate peace and steady power beyond natural abilities. I have sought for the gift to discern what is true in history and in life. My mind and soul unite in certainty that Christ is our Savior and that Joseph Smith was divinely sent to bring full Christianity back to earth. All knowledge brings responsibility, especially religious knowledge. I share with you a prayer that we will well live by that knowledge, in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.