

EVALUATING THREE ARGUMENTS AGAINST JOSEPH SMITH'S FIRST VISION



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There are numerous books and many more websites that work to undermine faith in Joseph Smith's First Vision, but historically there have been just three main arguments against it that are repeated by others in print or on the web. The minister to whom Joseph reported the event announced that there were no such things these days. More than a century later, Fawn Brodie wrote, with literary grace to mask her historical deficiencies, that Joseph concocted the vision years after he said it happened. Then, a generation later, Wesley Walters charged Joseph with inventing revivalism when a lack of historical evidence proved that there was none, and therefore there must have been no subsequent vision. So by now it has become a foregone conclusion for some that there are no such things as visions and that Joseph failed to mention his experience for years and then gave conflicting accounts that didn't match historical facts.¹

Each of the three arguments begins with the premise that the vision simply could not have happened as Joseph described it. Philosophers describe that kind of premise as *a priori*, a Latin term that describes knowledge that is, essentially, assumed. In other words, *a priori* knowledge does not rely on experience for verification. It is based on definitions, widely shared beliefs, and reason. Knowledge derived from experience is *a posteriori*. Joseph testified that he experienced a divine revelation and therefore knows that visions can and do happen. The epistemology in Joseph's First Vision accounts is *a posteriori*. The epistemology of Joseph's vision critics is *a priori*. They know that what Joseph said happened could not have happened because all reasonable people know that such things do not happen.

THE METHODIST MINISTER

"Some few days after I had this vision," Joseph reported, "I happened to be in company with one of the Methodist preachers" that had contributed to the religious fervor. "I took occasion to give him an account of the vision," Joseph said, continuing, "I was greatly surprised at his behavior; he treated my communication not only lightly, but with great contempt, saying it was all of the devil, that there were no such things as visions or revelations in these days; that all such things had ceased with the apostles, and that there would never be any more of them" (Joseph Smith—History 1:21). The preacher's premises, all *a priori*, were the following:

- Joseph's story was of the devil.
- There were no such things as revelations in what Dickens called "the age of railways."
- Visions or revelations ceased with the Apostles.

- There would never be any more visions or revelations.

No doubt this good fellow was sincere in each of these beliefs and was striving as best he knew to prevent Joseph from becoming prey to fanaticism. But he did not know from experience the validity of any of the four premises he set forth as positive facts. All he knew *a posteriori* is that he had not had a vision or a revelation. On what basis, then, could this minister evaluate Joseph's claims and make such sweeping statements?

An answer to that question lies in understanding the pressures on a Methodist minister in Joseph's area in 1820. Joseph did not name the minister to whom he reported the vision. It's not clear whether it was the Reverend George Lane, whom Joseph's brother William and Oliver Cowdery credited with awakening Joseph spiritually. Joseph "could have had contact with Reverend Lane at a number of points" during his ministry in Joseph's district between 1819 and the early 1820s, but he was always visiting the area from his home in Pennsylvania.² There were also local Methodist ministers to whom Joseph may have reported his experience. All of them were conscious that Methodism was tending away from the kind of spiritual experiences Joseph described and toward what they viewed as a more respectable, reasonable religion. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, had worried that Methodists would multiply exponentially in number only to become "a dead sect, having the form of religion without the power."³ And Methodism indeed grew abundantly because it took the claims of people like Joseph so seriously. Its preachers encouraged personal conversions that included intimate experiences with God, including visions and revelations. But then, as Wesley had worried, Methodism became less welcoming to such manifestations.⁴ Just as Joseph was coming of age, Methodism was becoming embarrassed by what respectable people regarded as its excesses. Methodism

had risen to meet the needs of the many people who could not find a church that took their spiritual experiences seriously. But with its phenomenal growth came a shift from the margin to the mainstream.

Joseph was likely naive about that shift, which is easier to see historically than it was at the time. Probably all Joseph knew is that he had caught a spark of Methodism and wanted to feel the same spiritual power as the folks he saw and heard at the meetings. He finally experienced that power in the woods, as so many Methodist converts, encouraged by their preachers, appeared to have done before him. So it was shocking to him when the minister reacted against what Joseph assumed would be welcome news.

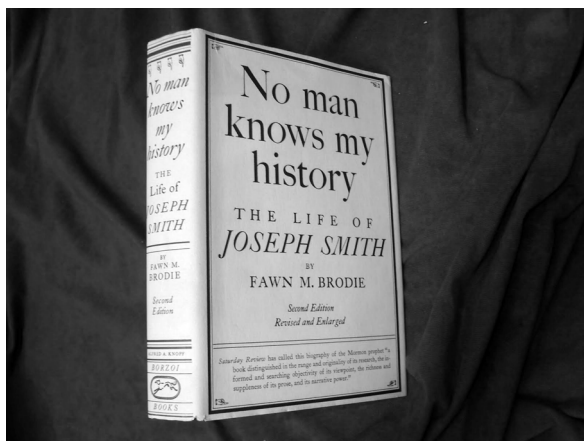
As for the minister, he may have heard messages in Joseph's story in ways that led him to respond negatively, especially if Joseph told him the part about learning that religious professors spoke well of God but denied his power. No Methodist minister wanted to hear that their founder's fear had been realized. Yet by 1820, many of them were concerned about what had for nearly two hundred years been termed *enthusiasm*, "derived from Greek *en theos*, meaning to be filled with or inspired by a deity."⁵ To be accused of enthusiasm in Joseph Smith's world was not a compliment. It meant that one was perceived as mentally unstable and irrational. Methodists had for several generations tried to walk a fine line that valued authentic spiritual experience yet stopped well short of enthusiasm. It seems likely that young Joseph was not attuned to the sophisticated difference that had been worked out by Methodist theologians. He reported to the minister what he thought would be a highly valued experience that seemed to resemble the experiences of other sincere Christians. But his experience was received as an embarrassing example of enthusiasm and was thus condemned.

FAWN BRODIE

Fawn Brodie largely shaped the skeptical interpretations of Joseph's First Vision. She first articulated major criticisms that others have since adopted and published and that circulate widely today. In the first edition of her biography of Joseph, published in 1945, Brodie cited his 1838 history, the one excerpted in the *Pearl of Great Price*. She reported that her efforts to research at the Church Archives were thwarted.⁶ She tried but could not access Joseph's 1832 diary. She did not draw on Joseph's 1835 journal or the undiscovered 1832 account in Joseph's Letterbook. She therefore concluded that no one had spoken of the vision between 1820 and about 1840. She interpreted that limited evidence to mean that Joseph concocted the vision in the wake of an 1837 banking crisis "when the need arose for a magnificent tradition."⁷

Fawn Brodie did not change her assumptions when she revised her biography of Joseph after the 1832 and 1835 accounts were discovered and published. She did not reconsider her interpretation in the light of evidence that showed Joseph had written and spoken openly of the vision on more than one occasion earlier than 1838. Rather, with characteristic insinuation, she simply substituted 1830 for 1834 in this sentence about the vision: "It may have been sheer invention, created some time after 1830 when the need arose for a magnificent tradition."⁸ She also noted in her second edition the differences in details between the accounts, suggesting that their inconsistencies evidenced Joseph's invention and embellishment of the story.

Fawn Brodie persuaded her publisher by emphasizing her "attitude of complete objectivity," but privately she and her closest adviser knew of her psychological need to understand Joseph's life and escape his influence. She reflected that writing the book enabled her to assert her independence. She called it a



Fawn Brodie largely shaped the skeptical interpretations of Joseph's First Vision when she wrote No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith, first published in 1945 by Alfred A. Knopf.

“compulsion to liberate myself wholly from Mormonism.” She decided in the process of preparing the biography to see in the historical facts evidence that Joseph consciously concocted the vision with intent to deceive. Having read an early draft of her biography, a close confidant wrote that he was “particularly struck with the assumption your MS makes that Joseph was a self-conscious imposter.” Though sympathetic to her work, this adviser worried about what he called her “bold judgments on the basis of assumptions.” A later reviewer noted similarly that she regularly stated “as indisputable facts what can only be regarded as conjectures supported by doubtful evidence.”⁹

It is not hard to empathize with Fawn Brodie. Having been raised as a Latter-day Saint, she chose to leave the faith and underwent a painful reorientation process that required her to reinterpret Joseph Smith’s First Vision. None of us are so very different from her. Our identities and psychologies are bound up in our various commitments. We cannot escape Joseph Smith’s First Vision any more than she could, and we work to make

sense of the evidence for ourselves in ways that are satisfying to our intellects and to our souls. But whatever her motives and our efforts to empathize, it is Brodie's method that concerns us here. Critical interpretations of Joseph's vision like hers share a common hermeneutic or explanatory method. They *assume* how a person in Joseph's position, or persons in his neighborhood, must have acted if his story was true and then show that his accounts vary from the assumed scenarios. They usually postulate a hypothetical alternative to Joseph's own explanation.¹⁰

REV. WESLEY WALTERS

That approach is also what the Reverend Wesley Walters used. He originated the enduring argument that Joseph's canonized First Vision account is anachronistic, or out of historical order. He was pastor of the United Presbyterian Church in Marissa, Illinois, when he published in the fall of 1967 an innovative article that asserted that there was no evidence of religious revival in Palmyra, New York, in the spring of 1820, and therefore Joseph's claim to have been influenced by such religious fervor must be false.¹¹ Richard Bushman said that Walters "performed a very positive service to the cause of Mormon History because he was a delver. He went deep into the heart of the archives. And Mormons had accepted a lot of things as simple facts—for example, that there was a revival in Joseph Smith's neighborhood around the 1820 period."¹² Walters noted accurately that prior to his work, Mormon scholars had "*assumed* that Joseph Smith's account must be correct."¹³ According to Bushman, Reverend Walters "made us realize that we can't assume anything. Everything had to be demonstrated and proved."¹⁴

That realization led Truman Madsen and the Institute of Mormon Studies at BYU to sponsor a team of talented,

well-educated young Mormon historians to research all the evidence they could find.¹⁵ As a result of their research, it is clear that there are two main weaknesses in the Walters argument, namely, the fallacies of negative proof and of irrelevant proof. Historian David Hackett Fischer defined the fallacy of negative proof as “an attempt to sustain a factual proposition merely by negative evidence. It occurs whenever a historian declares that there is no evidence that X is the case and then proceeds to affirm or assume that not-X is the case.”¹⁶ Walters argued creatively that “a vision, by its inward, personal nature, does not lend itself to historical investigation,” but “a revival is a different matter.” He posited, therefore, that he could disprove Joseph’s claim to a vision by showing “that in 1820 there was no revival in any of the churches in Palmyra and its vicinity.”¹⁷ He erred against the historical method by arguing, in other words, that a lack of evidence for a Palmyra revival was proof that the vision did not occur.

Reverend Walters also erred in arguing an irrelevant proof. Joseph’s accounts do not claim that the revivalism centered in Palmyra itself, as Walters argues, or that the revivalism occurred in 1820. Rather, Joseph said that the excitement began in the second year after his family moved to Manchester, New York, meaning in 1819, and he located the “unusual excitement on the subject of religion” around Manchester, not Palmyra. Joseph used a Methodist term to describe a wider geographical scope than Walters’s emphasis on the village of Palmyra. Joseph said “the whole *district* of country seemed affected” by the revivalism (Joseph Smith—History 1:5; emphasis added). To nineteenth-century Methodists, a district was somewhat akin to today’s Latter-day Saint stake or a Catholic diocese. Joseph claimed only that there was unusual religious excitement in the region or district around Manchester that began sometime in 1819, during the second year after his family’s move there (v. 5).

There is evidence that an intense revival stirred Palmyra in 1816–17, when Joseph moved there with his family. It may have catalyzed Joseph's 1832 description of his mind becoming seriously concerned for the welfare of his soul "at about the age of twelve years."¹⁸ Then about 1818, Joseph's family purchased a farm in Manchester, a few miles south of Palmyra. The next summer, Methodists of the Genesee Conference assembled at Vienna (now Phelps), New York, within walking distance of the Smith farm. The Reverend George Lane and dozens of other exhorters were present. One participant remembered the result as a "religious cyclone which swept over the whole region."¹⁹ Joseph's contemporary and acquaintance Orsamus Turner remembered that Joseph caught a "spark of Methodist fire" at a meeting along the road to Vienna.²⁰ A Palmyra newspaper and the diary of a Methodist minister confirm a weekend camp meeting in Palmyra in June 1820 at which "about twenty people were baptized and forty became Methodists."²¹ If he had known about this evidence, given the way he consistently interpreted evidence in support of his conclusion, Reverend Walters may have objected that a June 1820 camp meeting would have been too late to catalyze Joseph's early spring vision. And if so, he might be quite right—but not necessarily. It snowed heavily on May 28 that year, and given his realities in that environment, what Joseph may have thought early spring meant might be different from our assumptions of what it must mean. But Joseph's descriptions are not dependent on external events in Palmyra or in 1820. The diaries of Methodist itinerant Benajah Williams evidence that Methodists and others were hard at work in Joseph's district all the while. They combed the countryside and convened camp meetings to help unchurched souls like Joseph get religion. The response was phenomenal, especially in western New York, the home of nearly one-fourth of the six thousand Presbyterian converts in 1820. Baptist churches expanded

similarly.²² Methodism expanded most impressively as traveling preachers like Williams gathered anxious converts.²³

Reverend Walters focused on the word *reformation* used by Oliver Cowdery to describe the scope of the religious excitement, and on the Reverend George Lane, whom both Cowdery and William Smith, Joseph's brother, credited with being "the key figure in the Methodist awakening." Walters wrote that "there is no evidence" for these claims, which was an unwise thing to do.²⁴ Undiscovered evidence is not the same as non-existent evidence, and when Walters made the bold claim that no evidence existed, researchers quickly set out to see for themselves. Among the several evidences discovered since are the Williams journals. They document much religious excitement in Joseph's district and region of the country in 1819 and 1820. They report that Rev. George Lane was indeed in that area in both of those years and that while there in July 1820, he "spoke on Gods method in bringing about Reffermations."²⁵ Indeed, the Williams diaries attest that not only Lane but many Methodist preachers in Joseph's time and place catalyzed unusual religious excitement, as Joseph described. Writers who have not studied this evidence continue to parrot Walters and claim that "there was no significant revival in or around Palmyra in 1820," but the evidence fits Joseph's description nicely.²⁶

Though Walters interpreted them otherwise, Joseph's accounts are consistent with the mounting evidence. He said that the unusual religious excitement in his district or region "commenced with the Methodists" and that he became "somewhat partial" to Methodism (vv. 5, 8). The Walters thesis, though heartfelt and tenaciously defended by him and uncritically accepted and perpetuated by others, no longer seems tenable or defensible.²⁷ Walters succeeded in establishing "the fact that his [Joseph's] immediate neighborhood shows no evidence of an 1820 revival" without showing that anything Joseph said was

false.²⁸ Thin evidence for revivalism in Palmyra Village in 1820 is not evidence that there was not a vision in the woods near Manchester in the wake of well-documented religious excitement “in that region of country” (v. 5).

Latter-day Saints historians of the First Vision have credited Walters with awakening them to investigate the context of Joseph’s accounts, but they fault him for forcing his thesis.²⁹ We can easily understand, however, his determined efforts and unwillingness to give up his point. Joseph’s most definitive account of his vision relates how he told his mother, “I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true.” He also quoted the Savior as saying that the Christian creeds “were an abomination” (vv. 19, 20). Latter-day Saints who feel defensive about the reverend’s efforts to discredit the vision should be able to empathize with his response to Joseph’s testimony. In one sense, his determined and enduring devotion to his cause is admirable. Even so, his arguments are not as airtight as they may seem, and his evidence, or lack thereof, does not prove what he claims it does.

Similarly, the critics’ *a priori* certainty that the vision never happened as Joseph said it did is not a proven historical fact based on the testimony of witnesses or on hard data. Rather, those determined beliefs reflect each critic’s heartfelt, reasoned belief about what was possible. Their commitment to skepticism about the kind of supernatural events Joseph described prevented them from believing in the possibilities that the historical accounts of the First Vision offer. In other words, all of the unbelieving explanations share a common hermeneutic or interpretive method, sometimes called the hermeneutic of suspicion, which in this case simply means interpreting Joseph Smith’s statements skeptically, unwilling to trust that he might be telling the truth. One historian who doesn’t believe Joseph Smith said that he couldn’t trust the

accounts of the vision because they were subjective, and that it was his job to figure out what really happened. But how will this skeptical scholar discover what actually happened when he is unwilling to trust the only eyewitness or the process of personal revelation? Such historians assume godlike abilities to know, yet they don't trust God's ability to reveal truth or theirs to receive it. They don't seem to grasp the profound irony that they are replacing the subjectivity of historical witnesses with their own. I call their method "subjectivity squared." They dismiss the historical documents and severely limit possible interpretations by predetermining that Joseph's story is not credible. When Joseph's 1832 account was discovered in the 1960s, opening to Fawn Brodie new interpretive possibilities after her original thesis, she did not respond with willingness to consider that Joseph might be telling the truth but simply fit the new evidence into her previous conclusion. And because the evidence is now more abundant than ever, parts of Fawn Brodie's thesis are not as compelling as they once were. The evidence she analyzed in her second edition suggested to her that Joseph embellished each telling of the vision until it matured into the canonized 1838–39 account. But even later accounts do not continue to become longer, more detailed, or more elaborate. Rather, these accounts return to sounding like Joseph's earlier, less-developed accounts. This evidence can be interpreted as Joseph's intention to make his 1838 account definitive and developed for publication, whereas he left some accounts less developed, including ones later than 1838, because they were created for other purposes. Some were delivered on the spur of the moment and captured by someone later remembering them and writing them down.

The discovery of considerable evidence of revivalism in both 1819 and 1820 in and around Palmyra, and especially in the broader region Joseph described, did not alter the argument

Wesley Walters continued to make. No matter what evidence came to light, he interpreted it according to his original conclusion. He chose not to see the possibilities available to those who approach Joseph's accounts on a quest to discover if he could possibly be telling the truth.

For those who choose to read Joseph's accounts with the hermeneutic of suspicion, the interpretation of choice is likely to remain that Joseph elaborated "some half-remembered dream" or concocted the vision as "sheer invention."³⁰ Those are not historical facts. They are skeptical interpretations of the fact that Joseph reported that he saw a vision. There are other ways to interpret that fact. Indeed, the several scholars who have studied the accounts of the vision for decades and written the seminal articles and the only scholarly book on the vision share what one of them described as a hermeneutic of trust.³¹

One will arrive at the same conclusions as the skeptics if one shares their assumptions about what the facts mean. But if one is open-minded, other meanings for the same facts are possible. The danger of closed-mindedness is as real for believers as for skeptics. Many believers seem just as likely to begin with preconceived notions rather than a willingness to go where Joseph's accounts lead them. The reasoning process of many believers is no different from Fawn Brodie's. Some *assume*, for instance, that Joseph would obviously have told his family of the vision or written it immediately, that he always understood all of its implications perfectly or consistently through the years, that he would always remember or tell exactly the same story, or that it would always be recorded and transmitted the same. But none of those assumptions is supported by the evidence. Some believers become skeptics in short order when they learn of the accounts and find that their assumptions of what would happen if Joseph told the truth are not supported by the historical record.

Richard Bushman had just won the historians' prestigious Bancroft Prize when he responded with civility and grace to Reverend Walters. When I asked him why he chose to be so courteous, Bushman replied, "Simply as a tactical matter in any kind of controversy, it never serves you well to show scorn towards your opponent. That may make the people who are on your side rejoice and say, 'Kick them again.' But for those who are in the middle who are trying to decide which truth is right, you just alienate them—you just drive them into the hands of your opponent."³² Sometimes, in an effort to defend the faith, Latter-day Saints have responded with hostility to the critics of Joseph's vision. If there ever was an appropriate time for such a spirit, it is now past.

We are removed enough from the battlefield that we can respond less defensively and try instead to meet the needs of "those who are in the middle who are trying to decide which truth is right." I disagree with the *a priori* assumptions and historical interpretations of Fawn Brodie, Reverend Walters, and the Methodist minister who reproved Joseph, but I empathize with them. I may well have responded as they did if I were in different circumstances. Indeed, the minister's response and the reverend's are not so different from many Latter-day Saint defenses of our faith. Each of these critics is a child of God who is inherently valuable and interesting. They are vulnerable personalities, like the rest of us. They worked hard to figure out how to relate to Joseph Smith's First Vision. I wish to treat them as I would like to be treated by them and as Joseph taught the Relief Society sisters in Nauvoo. To them he said that "the nearer we get to our heavenly Father, the more are we dispos'd to look with compassion on perishing souls—to take them upon our shoulders and cast their sins behind our back. . . . If you would have God have mercy on you, have mercy on one another."³³

NOTES

1. Dan Vogel, *Joseph Smith: The Making of a Prophet* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2004), xv.

2. *The Latter Day Saints' Messenger and Advocate* (Kirtland, OH), December 1834, 42. William Smith, *William Smith on Mormonism* (Lamoni, IA: 1883), 6. *Deseret Evening News*, January 20, 1894, 11. Larry C. Porter, "Reverend George Lane—Good 'Gifts,' Much 'Grace,' Marked 'Usefulness,'" 199–226 of the present volume.

3. John Wesley, "Thoughts upon Methodism," in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. Rupert E. Davies, vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*, ed. W. Reginald Ward and Richard P. Heitzenrater (Nashville: Abingdon, 1976–), 527.

4. Christopher C. Jones, "The Power and Form of Godliness: Methodist Conversion Narratives and Joseph Smith's First Vision," *Journal of Mormon History* 37, no. 2 (Spring 2011): 88–114. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 241. See John H. Wigger's chapter, "Methodism Transformed," in his book *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998).

5. Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances & Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 17.

6. Newell G. Bringhurst, *Fawn McKay Brodie: A Biographer's Life* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 84–85.

7. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet* (New York: Knopf, 1945), 25.

8. Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History: The Life of Joseph Smith the Mormon Prophet*, 2nd ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), 25.

9. Bringhurst, *Fawn McKay Brodie*, 80, 87, 95, 105, 115.

10. Bringhurst, *Fawn McKay Brodie*, 106.

11. See, for example, Wesley P. Walters, “New Light on Mormon Origins From the Palmyra Revival,” reprinted in *Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 60–67.

12. Richard L. Bushman, interview by Samuel Alonzo Dodge, July 31, 2009, Provo, UT, transcription in possession of the author.

13. Walters, “New Light on Mormon Origins,” 61.

14. Richard L. Bushman, interview by Samuel Alonzo Dodge, July 31, 2009, Provo, UT, transcription in possession of the author.

15. Truman G. Madsen, “Guest Editor’s Prologue,” *BYU Studies* 9, no. 3 (Spring 1969): 235–40.

16. David Hackett Fischer, *Historians’ Fallacies: Toward a Logic of Historical Thought* (New York: Harper, 1970), 47.

17. Walters, “New Light on Mormon Origins,” 61.

18. Quoted in John Welch, ed., *Opening the Heavens: Accounts of Divine Manifestations, 1820–1844* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2005), 4.

19. Quoted in Milton V. Backman Jr., “Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision,” 171–98 of the present volume.

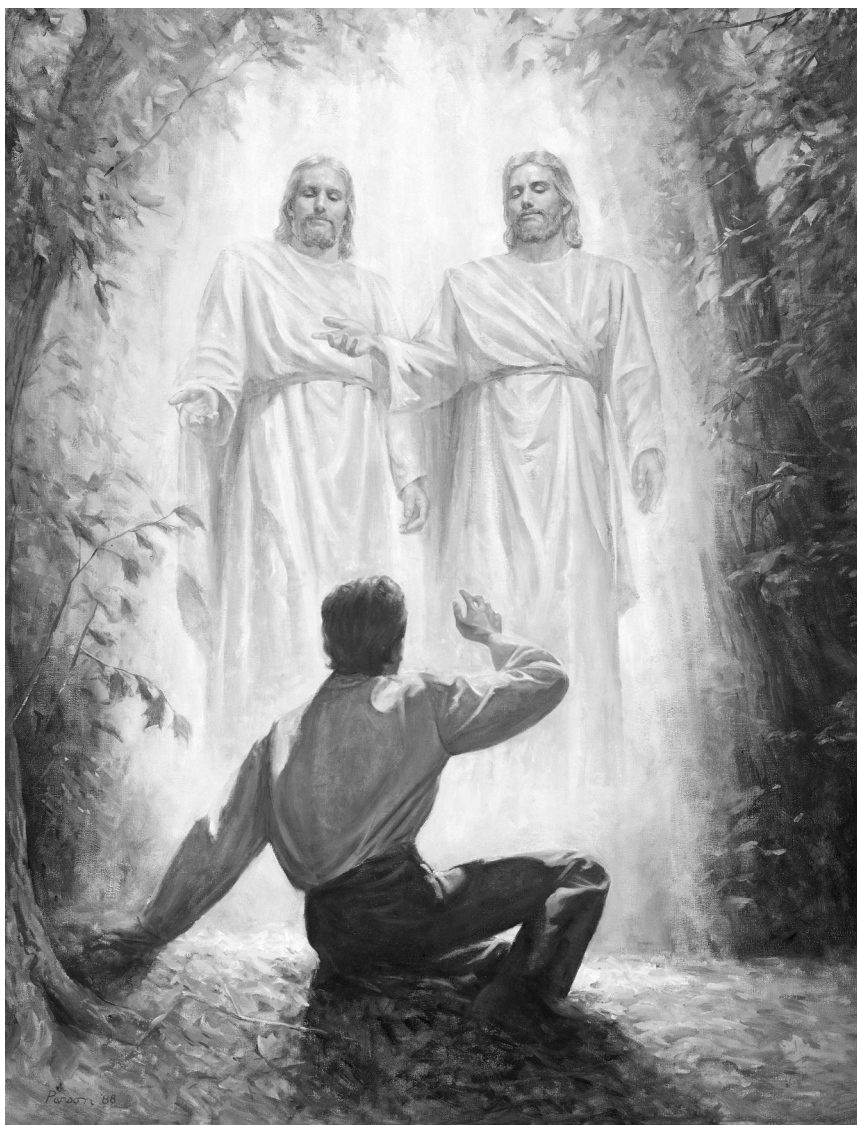
20. Orsamus Turner, *History of the Pioneer Settlement of Phelps and Gorham’s Purchase, and Morris’ Reserve* (Rochester, NY: William Alling, 1852), 213. Richard Lloyd Anderson evaluates Turner’s credibility as a witness in “Joseph Smith’s Accuracy on the First Vision Setting: The Pivotal 1818 Palmyra Camp Meeting,” 91–170 of the present volume.

21. Aurora Seager records this in a diary about “a camp-meeting at Palmyra” he attended in June 1818. See E. Latimer, *The Three Brothers: Sketches of the Lives of Rev. Aurora Seager, Rev. Micah Seager, Rev. Schuyler Seager*, D.C. (New York: Phillips & Hunt, 1880), 12, quoted on pages 2–3 of D. Michael Quinn, “Joseph Smith’s Experience of a Methodist ‘Camp Meeting’ in 1820,” *Dialogue* Paperless E-Paper 3, December 20, 2006.

22. Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith*, 268–69. Backman, “Awakenings in the Burned-Over District.”

23. John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 3–6.

24. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins," 62, 76.
25. Benajah Williams, diaries, in possession of Michael Brown, Philadelphia.
26. Robert D. Anderson, *Inside the Mind of Joseph Smith: Psychobiography and the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1999).
27. Backman, "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District," 309. Richard L. Bushman "The First Vision Story Revived," *Dialogue* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 85.
28. Walters, "New Light on Mormon Origins," 69.
29. Dean C. Jessee, James B. Allen (July 27, 2009), Richard Lloyd Anderson (July 29, 2009), Larry C. Porter (July 30, 2009), Richard L. Bushman (July 31, 2009), Milton V. Backman Jr. (August 12, 2009), interviews by Samuel Alonzo Dodge, transcriptions in possession of author.
30. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History*, 2nd ed., 25.
31. Richard L. Bushman, interview by Samuel Alonzo Dodge, July 31, 2009, Provo, UT, transcription in possession of the author.
32. Richard L. Bushman, interview by Samuel Alonzo Dodge, July 31, 2009, Provo, UT, transcription in possession of the author.
33. Discourse, June 9, 1842, Nauvoo, IL, "A Record of the Organization and Proceedings of the Female Relief Society of Nauvoo," 61–64, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. Also in *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, ed. B. H. Roberts, 2nd ed. rev. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1957), 5:23–25; and *The Words of Joseph Smith*, ed. Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1980), 122–24.



Once the First Vision assumed its predominant place in Mormon writing and preaching, it became much more than Joseph Smith's personal experience—it became a shared community experience. (Del Parson, The First Vision, © 1987 Intellectual Reserve, Inc.)