



Richard Lloyd Anderson

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INTERVIEW BY KAY AND
JOSEPH F. DAROWSKI



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THE INTERVIEW

K. DAROWSKI: Let us begin at the beginning, Richard. What can you tell me about your early childhood and your family?

ANDERSON: Salt Lake City was my birthplace. I was born in 1926 at an LDS Hospital. I have heard that my mother asked, “Is it a boy or a girl?” and when she was told it was a boy, she said, “Take it back!” I think she hoped to avoid some of the rough male ways of Rexburg, Idaho, where she had grown up. My mother was Agnes Ricks, an experienced elementary teacher. My father was Lloyd Ernest Anderson, a genial and principled Latter-day Saint who made a career in the newspaper business.

K. DAROWSKI: Tell us about growing up.

ANDERSON: That is a good question. Does it mean I'm grown up? I have a favorite book on counseling with a chapter called "How much of the child is left in you?" Physically I grew up in the Salt Lake City Avenues. We played tackle football in the open spaces of the Salt Lake Cemetery. My mother was quite careful, but amazingly she let me roam over the foothills northeast of Virginia Street and Fourth Avenue, where our home was. I have told people that my quest as a researcher was launched by the fact that the Salt Lake City garbage dump was just two blocks north of my house. There were wonderful discoveries for a boy there.

My mother played the violin, and I learned to love music, but at that time I did not love practicing the piano. One day when I was about nine, my mother asked me to practice, and I complained. Trying to shame me, she said, "If you really don't want to, you don't have to." I said, "Do you mean that?" When she answered, "yes," I said, "good," and walked out. Next I sat on the front step, bragging about my exploit to one of my friends, not noticing that my father had driven up. Then I heard a very firm voice call, "Richard!" When I answered, he said, "Get in here and practice!"

My parents were both firm and indulgent with me as the first child. I had a structured life, a great life, and I loved my parents. They gave me reasonable liberty. You might call me "questionable," since I asked a lot of questions. When one of my parents' friends who knew something about volcanoes or some other subject visited, I would inquire until I understood a little about his field. My father then went to a used bookstore and bought a full set of the *Book of Knowledge* for my use. I put a shelf and chair in a lighted closet and read connected articles in my child's encyclopedia. I kept that set for years until I realized how outdated it was; then I tried to pawn it off as a precious object to my children. I discarded these books only when I was over thirty, after learning many basics from them.

K. DAROWSKI: Tell us about your brothers and sisters.

ANDERSON: I was the oldest and the bossiest. I have read some on oldest children and agree with most of what I have seen. I have three siblings; one three years younger, named Janet, was born in 1929. Janet married Melvin Pack Mabey, now retired from the political science faculty at BYU. She had nine children and was an exceptional mother. (She died as a result of an auto turnover in Provo Canyon.) As she matured, she was patient with me and somehow survived my teasing, a childish practice which I regret. In 1937 my brother, Karl, was born; he married Joyce Hirschi, and they raised seven children. Then in 1939 my younger sister Margaret was born; she married Dale Gustaveson, and they raised six children.

I was both loving and judgmental with Karl, who was eleven years younger. I remember finding him and shepherding him home from street football on a Sunday afternoon. His white shirt was dirty and sweaty, and we were almost late for sacrament meeting. I gave generous instructions on watching his watch, adding, "In the future we may be bishops and stake presidents, but neither of us will amount to anything unless we can get to meetings on time." Later I became a counselor in a stake presidency, but he became a stake president and a regional representative. This was one of many lessons I learned in my earlier career as a Pharisee.

K. DAROWSKI: Did you always make it to meetings on time?

ANDERSON: I hear President Hinckley is always ten minutes early, which I think is a burden on the conscience of many Latter-day Saints, including me.

K. DAROWSKI: Walk us through your life in school.

ANDERSON: I went to Salt Lake City elementary schools up to the age of ten. Until then my father was the rural circulation manager of the *Deseret News*; next he became advertising manager of the *Provo Daily Herald*. Afterward he became advertising manager of the

Pocatello Tribune and then advertising manager of the *Ogden Standard Examiner* before going into business for himself.

Following that pattern, I came to Provo at the age of ten and went to fourth grade at the old Parker School in Provo. For fifth grade, my mother transferred me to the BYU Training School, on the lower campus, the present site of Academy Square and the Provo City Library. I cried for a time, thinking I would be deprived of mingling with real people in what I perceived as a formal, exclusive school. It wasn't that way, but it had that reputation.

I began high school in Provo, and the year after Pearl Harbor was attacked, my father went to Pocatello, Idaho, where my family lived until the middle of my senior year. We then moved to Ogden, and I graduated from Ogden High School. I took Latin in high school. But Hugh Nibley said his first Latin teacher was "hell on wheels," and my first one fit that description. I was able to have good Latin instruction in my junior and senior years. My high school education included valuable work experience. There was a labor shortage during World War II, and in Pocatello I managed the delivery of the *Salt Lake Tribune* to about five hundred subscribers. I would hire out much of the delivery work, but I handled collections. I saved nearly a thousand dollars from that and from farm labor. Those were rewarding days, when many families needed to pull together. Some of my savings paid for a major operation for my mother, and the rest paid the down payment for our home in Ogden. My father repaid me liberally by sending me on a mission. I maintained good grades in high school, but I also became a workaholic, which I consider an achievement, though I think I've been a reasonable one—I work hard, but I believe in giving time to my family first and to anyone who needs it. Jobs were plentiful in World War II. During my last summer in Pocatello, I would report for delivering papers at 5:00 a.m., return home to get mother's lunch box, and meet the bus at 7:00 a.m. to work on construction at nearby government facilities. Then on Saturday and Sunday I got up every three or four hours for a part-time job driving an old Chevrolet truck

to the railroad depot to transfer mailbags up to the main post office. I had marginal leisure throughout high school, but I had a great sense of personal achievement.

K. DAROWSKI: And then you went into the navy?

ANDERSON: Yes, after graduating from Ogden High School I volunteered for induction into the navy. We took exams in high school for naval officer training. I was one of two seniors selected, but then I failed the physical exam. There was a joke in World War II about the army physical, which was given on the second floor of one of the barracks at Fort Douglas. Supposedly two questions were asked. First, "Did you walk up those stairs?" Second, "What's your name? You're in the service now!" But I had a severe overbite, which disqualified me for naval officer training. Orthodontia was not stressed then, and my bottom teeth touched the top gum because of faulty occlusion. After failing this physical exam, I failed again after applying for naval pilot training. When I asked my dentist what could be done, he answered, "We can file your bottom teeth a sixteenth of an inch down so they won't touch the top gum. They'll grow back after a while, but you can at least pass the exam." So I had that done, and then I joined the navy as an air crewman. It was my job to be a radioman, at a battle station with a machine gun. I logged over five hundred hours in a search-and-rescue plane in World War II.

J. DAROWSKI: Where were you stationed?

ANDERSON: I was stationed mainly in the southeast United States. I went to boot camp in Jacksonville, Florida, then operational training and communications school in Memphis, Tennessee, and returned to Jacksonville for gunnery school. I earned wings as an aviation radioman, but I was not advanced as a petty officer because as World War II closed, advancements were curtailed as an economic strategy. I received an American Theatre of War medal because we patrolled beyond continental limits. We flew out two hundred miles

and looked for submarines. We trained for all kinds of South Pacific conditions in a PBV, which saw many significant missions. One of these planes was on patrol and spotted the Japanese fleet before the Battle of Midway.

J. DAROWSKI: The Catalina?

ANDERSON: The PBV was a mid-model Catalina without retractable landing gear. On takeoff, one of my assignments was to go to the rear Plexiglas bubbles, stand in waist-deep water, and boost the detachable wheels to their flight position.

K. DAROWSKI: Then the war ended, and you went on your mission?

ANDERSON: I was given considerable preparation for my mission because of the service. On December 7, 1941, it was a mild, sunny day in Provo, without snow. I walked home from church, kicking the late fall leaves. I was approaching sixteen, and Mother said the news of Pearl Harbor was an arrow through her heart, because she thought I would be in the national conflict that began that day. I was in the navy about a year before World War II ended, and I served almost another year before discharge. But I was constantly concerned about the mission I intended to serve. At the beginning, reality faced me when one of my best friends was drafted and killed in the Philippines. It was very possible that I wouldn't come back. At the end of high school, I read the whole Book of Mormon. I was a self-conscious teenager and didn't let my parents know, but I received a marvelous testimony. The teachings in Alma about justice and mercy in the Atonement made a deep impression, and I received an assurance in prayer that I would return alive from the war. That intensified my desires to be prepared for a mission. I received a patriarchal blessing from an old Brother Wheelright, who had never seen me before. He promised me that I would fill a mission with marked success.

Knowing that I would be surrounded by nonmembers in the service, I began to read Church books very thoroughly. I realized that I would be known as a Mormon and would immediately be on the spot for defending my faith. In addition to studying many books, I tried to develop my knowledge of the scriptures. While in the navy, I did a low-key interview with every returned missionary that I met. In my units, most Latter-day Saints were returned missionaries. For instance, when I first reported for duty in the navy in Florida, I was told to pick up cigarette butts. It was a Sunday afternoon, and I thought there were more inspirational activities, so I just took my little copy of the Book of Mormon and sat under a pine tree to read. A military policeman came by and gruffly asked, "Sailor, what are you doing?" I looked up, expecting to take the consequences, and answered, "I'm reading the Book of Mormon." The man broke out in laughter, because he was a returned missionary. He then gave me the good advice to obey orders. In my service career, I did conversational interviews with perhaps two hundred returned missionaries, and I found that they fell into a number of categories. At the extremes, some knew what they were doing, and some wasted their time. From those who were actually teaching, I gathered whatever insights that would prepare me for my mission after a military discharge. I also served a stake mission in Jacksonville, Florida, while stationed there.

K. DAROWSKI: This led into the Anderson Plan.

ANDERSON: Yes, the Anderson Plan was the result, but that name never came from me. We published it in the Northwestern States Mission as "A Plan for Effective Missionary Work," but the nickname "Anderson Plan" spread throughout the Church.

J. DAROWSKI: You served in the Northwestern States Mission?

ANDERSON: Yes, that assignment followed several unusual events. World War II ended in 1945, and a stream of ex-servicemen

filled up the missions again during 1946. The LDS Church was smaller then, and General Authorities still interviewed prospective missionaries. Elder Joseph F. Merrill of the Twelve interviewed me, and we had a very free conversation. I said, “I certainly will go where called—that’s why I’m here; but I feel I’ll be more effective if I go to an English-speaking mission, because I have done missionary work with people in the service. If I’m sent to an English-speaking mission, I’ll be ready the first day to knock on doors and get to work.” I was called to the northwestern states, and I began following the pattern that I’d learned from stake missionaries and from returned missionaries in the service. Among them was Reid Bankhead, who later taught religion here at BYU. He gave a series of firesides in Jacksonville, Florida, based on the concept of stressing doctrines that are distinctive for Latter-day Saints. I saw the value of that idea and began organizing scriptures around these basic doctrines.

As my military service was ending, I had thought intensely about the coming full-time mission. I prayed repeatedly that I would have a mission president who would allow me to get to work and use my initiative. That prayer was literally answered. When I arrived at the mission headquarters in Portland, Oregon, President Samuel Bringham was away on mission business, and I was sent to the field. I didn’t even see him for three months, so I kept contact by mission reports, though I was pretty much left alone in Bend, Oregon. A missionary there proposed a district song from the hymnbook, “Out in the Desert They Wander.” I was soon entrusted with leadership, becoming a senior elder in a month and a district president of missionaries and branches in two months. If I called President Bringham, he would respond, “Elder Anderson, you’ve been sent there; you’ve got the authority to make the decision.” So I was given latitude beyond my years. President Bringham was replaced by Joel Richards, a highly successful insurance executive who was the brother of Elder LeGrand Richards. He began his term with a mission conference, after which I felt impelled to phone him with a simple message: “We’re having

good results in missionary work in Bend, Oregon, and I'd like to tell you about it." He answered, "I want to hear about it—bring your companion and take the next bus to Portland." Being in insurance, he knew that successful agents organized their presentations. He transferred me to another district and tested our methods, and then adopted them for the mission. Soon I wrote out the plan, and it filled a churchwide vacuum caused by the shrinkage of the missionary force in World War II and the lack of know-how as postwar missionaries flooded back. The Anderson Plan spread to perhaps 60 percent of the missions of the Church.

K. DAROWSKI: You served for two and a half years?

ANDERSON: It was typical then to serve two and a half years if you were on a foreign mission. An English-speaking mission was usually two years. I asked President Joel Richards for an extension and got it. With youthful self-centeredness, I didn't ask my father, but he was generous enough to pay for it. As I look back over the mission, it fulfilled the blessing given when set apart by a junior Apostle, Spencer W. Kimball. As I felt a powerful spiritual assurance, he promised me that I would be a "peacemaker in the branches," and he charged me "to learn a new word daily." During my last year, I was a counselor in the mission presidency and traveled constantly to different branches to work with the missionaries stationed there. I also believe that expanding my English skills was personal counsel to one who would become a teacher and writer.

K. DAROWSKI: Did you begin college right after your mission?

ANDERSON: Technically I began college with an evening class at Jacksonville Junior College, using my one night of liberty each week. A speech class furnished a memorable experience that gave me an insight into the logical side of my mind. We were assigned to memorize a speech from a Shakespeare play and recite it with meaningful phrasing. I lost composure before the large class, most of whom were

my seniors. So I plodded through the speech without using many of Shakespeare's words and was given a humiliating public evaluation. As I walked out of the session, a navy lieutenant commander in the class said, "That was a remarkable performance." I responded with some comment about the teacher already making that point. He replied, "No, really, I sat there looking at the text. You did not miss an idea in the entire speech, but you totally used alternative words. Conceptually you had the whole thing organized in your mind, but it came out in an unfamiliar form."

K. DAROWSKI: And after your mission you enrolled at Weber State?

ANDERSON: When I was released, I traveled home by bus. About 4:30 p.m. I arrived at the Ogden Trailways station, which was a block below Washington Boulevard and about three blocks from the old Weber College campus. I walked that distance with my bags, registered, and was in class at eight o'clock the next morning, following up with two quarters at Weber College. That spring I went to Provo to discuss my options with Hugh Nibley, who had recently come to BYU trailing academic clouds of glory. His knowledge was phenomenal, and his recall immediate. I said to him, "I could stay at Weber College another year, but I want to learn Greek. What should I do?" With his rugged self-assurance, Nibley advised, "You can learn Greek on your own; just come down here when you've developed a reading knowledge." The Ogden option was tutoring with my high school Latin teacher, whom I admired very much. She was a no-nonsense person and had a master's degree in classics from Berkeley. Staying in Ogden would include a debate scholarship at Weber College while taking basic required courses. So Nibley's answer was to stay in Ogden, live at home, and then transfer to BYU.

On the other hand, Sidney B. Sperry, head of the Division of Religion at BYU, reacted differently when he heard of my situation. So he wrote, offering a teaching assistantship and requesting that I

come to Provo to confer with him and Hugh Nibley. At the same time Brother Sperry told Nibley to tell me, “You must come here; don’t stay at Weber College. BYU has a better academic program for your needs.” So Hugh took a 180-degree turn, writing that college debating “went out with the raccoon coat and the bulldog.” Brother Nibley became my closest friend on the faculty. I soon saw that he had no patience with aimless visiting. I learned to walk into his office, ask specific questions, and leave promptly after his answers. He privately remarked that there were two people that he never worried about coming in and talking to him, meaning me and another person who was my friend. This was because we got to the point and didn’t waste his time. My mission increased my interest in history, which became my college major. For me the Mormon concept of the gospel Restoration easily fits into the recent centuries that are ages of discovery and expansion of knowledge. Informed Latter-day Saints expect to deal with laws of cause and effect everywhere, which is also the concern of history in a broad human perspective. My college minor was Latin, partly for the efficiency of being able to test out of some classes and make up time. But I started serious Greek study that ultimately led to a master’s degree in ancient Greek. When I was a missionary in Bend, Oregon, an amateur scholar challenged some missionary interpretations based on English readings, raising the obvious question of the original terms. This resulted in a lifetime study of first-century Greek, and I give the Church high marks for doctrinal accuracy, as explained in detail by my recently revised edition of *Understanding Paul*. I completed a BA in two and a half years and married and graduated in the spring of 1951.

My first year of Harvard Law School was idyllic, but instead of studying law totally, I read the full seven volumes of the *History of the Church*. This illustrates how LDS history has been an active lifetime interest, much more than a hobby. A similar active interest has been early Christian history. At Harvard I unofficially audited Greek and Latin classes. And in my third year at Cambridge I obtained the

approval of my dean to go to the “yard,” the central university court, and take Greek history for credit. So I was able to keep interests alive in Mormon history, in Greek and Latin as tools for Christian history, and in the study of law. Perhaps not wisely, I politely turned down an invitation to join a law fraternity. I felt I didn’t have time for that, because I was multitasking on the above areas, plus marriage and Church work.

I finished law school and passed the bar exam. Yet it’s only been until now that I could concentrate on Joseph Smith and his period. Nobody has given me the date of my transfer into the next world, but I have some anxiety to finish a number of projects on the Prophet, his family, and the witnesses of the Book of Mormon.

K. DAROWSKI: After law school, did you practice law?

ANDERSON: I practiced law in the sense of picking the things that I wanted to do. I drew up legal papers and did some family law, mainly adoptions. I did one of our own adoptions, putting my wife, Carma, on the witness stand and asking if she intended to be a good mother. For some time she felt I had thrown doubt on her performance, though I thought it was a question the judge would be interested in. We have educated each other, and I have told religion classes that marriage has taught me more than any PhD ever could, and Carma has been my mentor.

One year I indexed the Utah session laws, but I finally realized that doing law things was different from practicing law; and practicing law was not profitable without going to court, which was blocked by my teaching schedule. From then on I have paid inactive fees, though I could still practice if there were time. I gradually learned to scale down other interests. For some years I taught regular classes in the history department—the first half of world civilization, and Roman and Greek history. In midcareer I set those aside because of time and specialization. But toward the end of my teaching career, I couldn’t choose between full concentration on New Testament and

early Christian history on the one hand, and early Mormon history on the other. They have remarkable parallels.

K. DAROWSKI: I have in my notes that you moved to Cedar City for a year.

ANDERSON: After law school, I was admitted to Harvard for an ancient history PhD. I tutored the following summer in Latin and Greek and sought to raise private money for graduate school that fall. I finally called William E. Berrett, who was the Church Educational System head at that time, and he responded: "We've got a Cedar City position open for you. You can be there for a year and then come to BYU the following year." That year was a broadening experience, as I learned the quality of a southern Utah heritage. I taught one class in the institute and a sociology class at the College of Southern Utah. I developed strong friendships with my seminary principal, Rodney Turner, and with the institute director, Paul Felt. Later the three of us were colleagues on the religion faculty at BYU.

K. DAROWSKI: And then you came back to BYU to teach?

ANDERSON: I was hired to teach at BYU in the fall of 1955, and I stayed three years. During that time I did a master's degree in classics and prepared to leave for the University of California, Berkeley, where I earned a doctorate in 1961. My major field was Greek and Roman history, with minor fields in medieval history and early Christian Church history to the Renaissance.

K. DAROWSKI: What do you remember about your experiences at Berkeley?

ANDERSON: The Berkeley experience enriched my mind and life, replacing the classroom dialogues in law school with personal advisement and mentoring. The Berkeley history faculty had just completed a study that showed that it generally took about seven years of graduate work for a doctorate. The professors were shocked

and created a modified schedule on an English model, which would focus on exams rather than classwork. I was able to do seminars, write required papers, and schedule written area exams as soon as I felt prepared. Thus I finished the PhD in three years. I had highly competent professors and a good relationship with all of them, including William Sinnigen, a specialist in Roman administration, who was my major adviser.

J. DAROWSKI: Did you do a dissertation?

ANDERSON: Yes, but explaining it would force this interview into overtime. It was on two historians, one from the early Roman Empire and another from the late empire, contrasting and explaining their degree of loyalty to the superstate in two different periods. The first historian, Velleius Paterculus, was a loyalist and has been somewhat rehabilitated since I wrote. He was contemporaneous with Jesus, and the study brought me into the first-century Roman world, which was the world of Paul. The second historian was Ammianus Marcellinus, a sort of brilliant dissenter like Tacitus. His rationale of the unstable late-empire society has significant parallels to the explanations of Mormon and Moroni about the same time period.

J. DAROWSKI: And in what language was it published?

ANDERSON: Of course it was published in English. I did learn classical languages, Latin and Greek, on a reading basis, and I learned French and German on that level also. I later upgraded to conversational German when Carma and I taught in the BYU Semester Abroad program in Salzburg, Austria.

Back to Berkeley, I moved from doctoral studies to the position of lecturer there in classical and medieval rhetoric. This sounds like an obscure subject, but the Department of Speech dealt with form and content, basically dealing with intellectual history. While I was a graduate student there, Hugh Nibley came to Berkeley for a year to teach these subjects, but he then returned to BYU. The department

was impressed with Hugh, and I rode in on his coattails. After a year I was offered a tenure-track position, but I strongly felt I should return to BYU.

K. DAROWSKI: What was the religion department like when you came back to BYU in the early 1960s?

ANDERSON: At that point, Religious Education was a college, with David Yarn as the dean. David is a gentleman and is very gracious. He carried the best of his southern Atlanta, Georgia, culture with him, plus a good mind and a Columbia doctorate degree. I loved working with Dean Yarn, and I've greatly respected all my deans since that time. Their earlier work laid the foundations for today's faculty in Religious Education, which is strong in learning and also strong in faith, as suggested by the revelations to the first theological school in the Church. And the publishing trajectory continues in the quality output of the Religious Studies Center, with parallel developments of FARMS, and now the Maxwell Institute. There are many ways to classify the crosscurrents in religious study: liberalism versus conservatism, humanism versus orthodoxy, evolving religion versus revealed religion. In perspective, these may only be human battlegrounds, with many half-truths at the extremes. In the early 1960s, Religious Education at BYU reflected earlier trends and methodologies learned by faculty members from graduate work in the Midwest, East, and abroad. As an undergraduate, I heard President Kimball give a devotional talk called "A Style of Our Own," pleading for clothing consistent with gospel values. Since the early 1960s, Religious Education has strongly moved into "A Scholarship of Our Own." By this I do not mean religious oversimplification of a subject, what Nibley could parody as "Mathematics for Mormons." Instead, I see decades of BYU scholars taking our scriptures seriously as sources that illuminate religious understanding and fit into what is known of their time periods. I also see a lessened tendency to define scholarship superficially as "what the scholars say." A true scholar knows what

his peers say but relies on firsthand sources in his field. Thus some views of faculty members in the early 1960s are outdated, because they relied only on the scholarly opinions and did not dig deeply themselves. I also reflect on what I was like returning to BYU in the early 1960s. Soon after returning to BYU, I completed the Berkeley PhD, but I tried to avoid the pride that might be packaged with it. While avoiding the artificial trappings of academia, I probably had an unhealthy zeal for knowledge. Just as it took time to become a considerate parent, it took time to become an encouraging teacher. I gradually developed skill in perceiving problems and empathizing with people. These early teaching years also brought improvement in empathy in marriage. I had academic skills but still needed to develop many people skills.

K. DAROWSKI: You've had an interesting career as a result of blending your interests in early Christianity and early Mormonism. How did you work that out while pursuing scholarship in both areas?

ANDERSON: The logical connection is studying the origins of two prophetic religions, which we understand as anciently revealed and modernly restored. I've always been puzzled that a dedicated Christian could see Mormonism as an aberration, because I see the same historical strengths in ancient Christianity and its restoration, which is misleadingly called Mormonism. In both cases faith is required to believe the prophets of God, the forerunners and witnesses of both dispensations. In both cases the call went out that new prophets were sent, an evident parallel between early Christianity and the Restoration of Christ's Church. The strength of apostolic witnesses of ancient Christianity led me to probe the documents created by the witnesses of the Book of Mormon and those who reported contact with them. My early work in published sources revealed ragged copying, textual variants in the printings of witnesses' statements or reports when interviewing a Book of Mormon witness. I was trained in law, history, and classics to get to the earliest or best text. In Mormon

history, earliest copies were mainly but not exclusively in Salt Lake City, so serious work included checking original documents there. In studying early Christianity, equivalent work involved finding photographs or published editions of scriptures or Christian personalities within the shadows of the New Testament. Of course these Christian records are in the Mediterranean, but I've had a strict commitment to learn everything possible on the origins of early Christianity, concentrating on the lives of Christ and Paul, as well as modern Christianity, concentrating on the lives of Joseph Smith and the witnesses of the Book of Mormon, including Oliver Cowdery, who with Joseph is a priesthood restoration witness. It's my passion for sources that really committed me to linking the early Church and the Restoration.

K. DAROWSKI: The last time I saw a number, you had published about 150 articles and several books, and basically you're evenly divided between publishing scholarship on the ancient Church and the modern Church. Did you say, "This year I'm going to focus on this one, and next year I'll focus on the other one"? Did you leapfrog from one to the other, or did you follow themes?

ANDERSON: I think I prayed every day that I would work on something pleasing to the Lord. I'm not sure that he wanted me to write every article that I've written. I've had some turned down, but I've had many accepted. Articles are generally motivated by the interests of the author and the need in the field. But I've mainly worked with the idea of need, looking for any major gaps that needed to be studied in the early Christian and Mormon foundations. I'm sort of a detective at heart. I like to solve problems. I've come to focus on relevance, asking, "Is this topic worth writing about?" For instance, in my early career I submitted an article about humor as evident in early Latter-day Saint history. When it was turned down, I felt the editors were snobbish. Yet on reflection the piece deserved rejection because it didn't pass the test of relevance—it was fluff, mainly created for entertainment. Early I realized my main contributions would

be serious articles on the beginnings—reconstructing the lives and experiences of Christ and his Apostles, including building significant knowledge of the life and experiences of Joseph Smith.

J. DAROWSKI: With the range of work that you've done, and the mass of what you have been able to accomplish, are there things that you feel particularly good about—projects where you've recognized a need or gap, or that were very satisfying to work on, or that stand out for you personally, or that you've been grateful that you got to work on?

ANDERSON: For me a significant topic is ready to be shared when the evidence adequately proves the point of the article, when it establishes solid knowledge that is not likely to be revised. One of my most important and productive subjects is my work on the testimonies of the witnesses of the Book of Mormon. My files contain well over 160 statements of actual or reported contacts with the Three Witnesses and over three dozen like sources from the Eight Witnesses. I summarized this extensive material in a small book that is still in print, *Investigating the Book of Mormon Witnesses*. There are various degrees of accuracy and detail in reporting what these witnesses said, but there is an overall consistency and insistence of the Three Witnesses that they beheld the plates and an angel and heard the voice of God declare the translation to be correct. Likewise, there is an insistence of the Eight Witnesses that their testimony as written was strictly true, that they had handled and examined heavy metal plates that had the appearance of an ancient record.

Making a source collection of all this material is not enough—it has to be analyzed. Besides my small book, I've written many articles involving correlations and hope to do much more. In my small book, I published a composite interview with David Whitmer, reconstructed from the various questions and answers in the David Whitmer interviews. It is remarkable to have such details for a major religious event. In a sense I've been an archaeologist of the visions of Joseph Smith

and the Book of Mormon witnesses, locating obscure accounts and allowing the founders to tell about their corporate revelations. My experience is that they do it very well, given the fact that every interview is a partial record of what was said. The vision accounts of the witnesses harmonize in important ways. Critics have created false contradictions from a few atypical reports, insisting on interpretations counter to the many other well-reported statements from the Book of Mormon witnesses. When fair historians let the Book of Mormon witnesses explain themselves, they do so in harmony with the witnesses' statements printed in the Book of Mormon.

I used years of time and energy on the Book of Mormon witnesses, because I felt Joseph Smith's life was the popular topic, and I would not compete in that arena. With more experience I felt that the need to check sources was as great in his life as it was in the lives of the Book of Mormon witnesses. A trivial example is the name of the respected schoolteacher who taught the Prophet basic letters in Royalton, Vermont. Current biographies call him Deacon Jonathan Rinney, or Finney, but the primary source (his granddaughter) gives the correct answer—Kinney. This connects with my answer on especially significant writings. In about 1970, plans were nearly completed for a leave to study Semitic languages in Chicago, when I canceled in favor of finishing *Joseph Smith's New England Heritage*, which was revised and republished in 2003. Bushman listed it as one of four books he relied on in creating his pilot biography, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism*. Brodie had previously portrayed Joseph Smith's New England grandfathers as "irreligious," but the facts were far otherwise. In another article, I carried this study into early New York, showing how standard language was used in the creation of neighborhood affidavits portraying the Palmyra-Manchester Smiths as lazy and interested only in money digging. The former label is flatly incorrect, while the latter is misleading. In her manuscript, the Prophet's mother said the overriding passion of the family in these years was "the welfare of our souls." My work on the early religious

life of the Prophet shows, and I hope additions will also show, that Joseph Smith's narratives contain his accurate religious history and the accurate religious history of his family. These articles are not well known now, but those published before 2000 are listed in David Whittaker's "Topical Bibliography."

K. DAROWSKI: I'm going to ask about your research on early Mormon Church history with your brother Karl. How have you interacted through the years?

ANDERSON: Both Karl and I showed our distinct personalities early, in my case pestering my parents with questions while advancing from childhood. Karl has a warm, human side, shown by his practical jokes in his teens. Karl went into business and modeled after our father, who was a quiet genius at selling. Anybody observing his approaches was impressed with his ability to relate to his clients, moving from jovial conversation to presenting his product and the evidence for its value. I can present evidence—I got that from my father, but Karl got that, plus my father's ability to relate to people out of genuine concern for them. After an MBA from the University of Utah, Karl went east, and his work assignments took him to several strategic locations for Church history, including upper Illinois, New York's Finger Lakes, and then sustained residence east of Cleveland, near Kirtland.

Karl had built up good benefits in a major corporation in Detroit when he felt spiritually directed to venture into a software company based in Cleveland. After a year there, he was called as a stake president; after five years he was called as regional representative, serving eight years, after which he has served in area and mission callings that have enabled him to continue to study Church history and Mormon sites in that region. Thus he became a well-informed guide to Joseph Smith's Kirtland, which he later titled one of his books. Some decades ago, site acquisition was not encouraged because of the initial price and also the cost of time and money in upkeep. Yet

Kirtland was an undeveloped treasure. Karl well earned the title “Mr. Kirtland” because he’s never lost the dream of redevelopment through years of encouragement and discouragement. I feel that he was placed in the area by the providence of the Lord. You asked about our cooperation. I visited Cleveland on an occasional vacation or research trip. But Karl was always willing to do an interview for me, locate a document, or check on important library holdings in the area. Then he began to ask me to check out the Kirtland sources that were available in Provo and Salt Lake City. When I knew his interests, I would often double-copy a source and put one in the mail to Karl. This small investment in my brother has rewarded me richly, for I have heard him explain the significance of Kirtland several times on site. Karl has a gift of welding the Kirtland revelations to the detailed history of Kirtland. I regard him as a skilled and inspired historian of the Kirtland story. We are indebted to each other, though both of us have been independently led of the Lord. In our research, both of us have tried to adapt Christ’s injunction to the Twelve: “Freely ye have received, freely give” (Matthew 10:8).

J. DAROWSKI: You are legendary in terms of the effort you put forth, and particularly as a review editor your contribution to the Joseph Smith Papers Project is enormous. Alex Smith, an editor of *Journals, Volume 2*, sent you 123 double-spaced pages of text and annotation to review. He says you’ve given him back eighty single-spaced pages of response. You have saved them in so many places by helping them see a better source or steering them away from a track that was either going to be a dead end or lead them astray. Alex says your material is absolutely essential, and when we’re done with these volumes that you’ve responded to we should publish your notes as a commentary on the *Papers*.

ANDERSON: I’m grateful for the generous evaluations made by you and Alex. Yet if historians get any respect, they should be very humble. Like the courts, we’re always subject to new developments

that might change answers or details or modify opinions. There will be appendices and additions to anyone's work.

J. DAROWSKI: Let's talk about the Joseph Smith Papers Project, which takes up much of your time currently. What do you see as its contributions?

ANDERSON: One thing the project may not do is produce a short, one-volume summary of the life of Joseph Smith. You are closer to the center than I, but the current figure envisions about two dozen volumes. As you know from staff meetings, the project aims to furnish a set of reasonably comprehensive sources on the Prophet's life that will match the detail of similar collections of great American leaders: Franklin, Jefferson, Lincoln, etc. So the completed project should give superficial writers on Joseph Smith a guilty conscience, knowing that they have opposed him or explained him with a fraction of information that will be on the library shelves in *The Joseph Smith Papers*. The conscientious biographer or historian will now have to deal with a wide sweep of materials that support the Prophet's divine mission and how well he fulfilled it. So the project leaders realistically picture a new era of Joseph Smith history.

In past years, the cost of assembling Joseph Smith materials was high in time and travel and duplication expenses. Now thousands of sources will migrate from the archives into a published version, assembled, dated, meticulously copied, and annotated by a team of experts. And *The Joseph Smith Papers* will include all known major documents, whether in Church Archives or gathered from major collections elsewhere. The coming efficiency of using the full Joseph Smith record is enormous. Paul said that he was not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, and the Latter-day Saint Church is investing capital and labor in declaring it is not ashamed of the full history of its founding Prophet. As you know, the project's major patron, Larry H. Miller, is touched by this relevance of history to the mission of the Church, repeatedly quoting William W. Phelps: "Millions shall know Brother Joseph again."

K. DAROWSKI: And you've been involved for several years with the Oliver Cowdery Project. What can you tell us about that?

ANDERSON: In my lifelong work on the Book of Mormon witnesses, I gathered everything I could find about Oliver Cowdery and classified and categorized it into files. As already mentioned, Mormon sources are mainly at the Church History Library, but many are not. Significant manuscript collections are at the Community of Christ Archives, University of Utah, Huntington Library, Chicago Historical Society, Yale University, and many more. About thirty years after I started collecting, Scott Faulring visited many places and gathered documents I had not seen, some classified after my visits. As we compared notes, I said, "Scott, we need to collaborate so that we can put together what you've got and what I've got." So that's how our partnership started. Scott has electronically formatted about 1,200 documents that are from, by, or about Oliver Cowdery. The result will be four volumes, to be published under the direction of Jack Welch, editor of *BYU Studies*. We hope these volumes will do the same thing for Oliver Cowdery that *The Joseph Smith Papers* will do for Joseph Smith—among other things, encourage people to go to the sources that Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery produced, then feel the intelligence and integrity of these men, and at the same time observe the solidity of the historical record of the revelations and sacrifices that brought forth new revelation, restored authority, and resulted in the Restoration of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

J. DAROWSKI: With the Cowdery papers, what parameters did you set for yourself in approaching annotation? Would you interpret or would you just try to expound on what was in the document and maybe explain context? Some would say your job would be to provide the resource or service of just creating a good transcription and letting the document speak for itself. Others would say you have an obligation to share whatever knowledge you have about an

individual and the circumstance of a document. How do you balance those tensions in working with documents?

ANDERSON: I suppose Scott and I have been so busy working on the project and producing the annotations that we haven't had time to talk about our philosophy of doing it. To give a more careful answer, we have gathered and formatted about 90 percent of our documents, and I've assumed responsibility for most headnotes and footnotes, which are mostly done through 1837. We give a general introduction for each document, placing it in context, with interpretive details placed in footnotes, which are generally few but increase with complex documents. This is especially true of two that Scott studied in depth—Oliver Cowdery's 1829 revelation on the priesthood and the more comprehensive revelation of Joseph Smith (section 20), given close to the organization of the Church. Scott may want to do more if the tragedy of his stroke last year can be reversed.

In writing a headnote, some documents take minimal comment, but others can be misunderstood without a context. So I tend to follow your second option—"to share whatever knowledge you have about an individual and the circumstance of a document." In particular, we have a string of sources showing Oliver Cowdery's anger with Joseph Smith in the winter of 1837–38, culminating in his leaving the Church that spring. They require reconstructing the background—some insight into 1835 polygamy in Kirtland and the impact of the 1837 depression that devastated Church finances and left both Joseph and Oliver heavily indebted for wholesale purchases for Church stores, complicated by holdover debts in constructing the temple that was dedicated in 1836. These difficult events are to some extent reflected in the tone and content of Oliver's 1838 letters.

J. DAROWSKI: Julian Boyd, the longtime editor of *The Thomas Jefferson Papers*, began to be criticized for being so enthralled with Jefferson that he defended anything Jefferson did. You've worked with Paul and Oliver Cowdery and Joseph Smith as intimately as the

record allows. How do you remain a scholar and keep from being caught up in becoming a cheerleader or champion for them?

A N D E R S O N : Every historian and every reader has this challenge. We develop stereotypes, often repeating standard labels for past personalities. But one can also be biased against one's subject. There are Mormon historians who seem to think that negativism is a badge of objectivity, but muckraking does not belong in responsible biography. There are two processes in writing a significant life of a major figure—gathering data comprehensively and evaluating events fairly. In the latter process, the common saying is relevant, that you can judge without being judgmental. Here hostility toward the subject is every bit as distorting as screening out everything negative. In a Susan Easton Black collection, *Expressions of Faith*, I wrote an essay called "Christian Ethics in Joseph Smith Biography." It stresses that Joseph Smith biographers should not rush to a negative conclusion because of an atypical source when a broader reading of other documents on the subject will show that Joseph Smith was a man of altruism and distinct social responsibility. On what you call "cheerleading," since law school I have reflected on how the historian resembles the ideal of the lawyer as "advocate." For the legal profession, that term has connotations akin to the difference between a statesman and a politician. My law professors periodically commented on a lawyer's double duty—to his client and also to the courts. I recently happened upon my copy of the "Attorney's Oath," administered in court and handed individually to my contingent of new attorneys in 1955. Each neophyte pledged to represent his or her clients but not to "mislead the judge or jury by any artifice or false statement of fact or law." Conceptually, the historian can admire the subject but retain a professional commitment to the truth. Joseph Smith did not ask his biographers to manufacture a paper saint. Thomas Bullock's detailed notes contain this sentence of the Prophet near the end of the discourse of May 12, 1844: "I never told you I was perfect; but there is no error in the revelations which I have taught." I have industriously gathered

and filed the positive and the negative for the lives of Joseph Smith and his early associates in founding the restored Church. In his preface to the *Discourses of Brigham Young*, Widtsoe was impressed that huge amounts of surviving speech notes could produce such little material to discredit Brigham's character. I can say similar things about Joseph and Oliver, while recognizing, as both men said of themselves, that they had human weaknesses.

J. DAROWSKI: Let's pursue the notion of how you can recognize your own biases and leanings but at the same time be fair to your subject.

ANDERSON: The answer begins with a sincere determination to "tell the truth and the whole truth," an ethical duty of every historian. "Fair to your subject" should be interpreted as the historian's primary goal to understand his subject rather than defend the subject in a polemical sense. Of course, many biographers correct false statements about their subject, a corrective defense. In 1838, however, Joseph Smith reported that the angel informed him that slander and controversy would surround his name (Joseph Smith—History 1:33). We would expect Joseph Smith's striking claims to continue to produce reactive biography with various degrees of fairness or lack of it. Nevertheless, his best histories should let Joseph Smith tell his own story. This is largely possible because the Prophet left major accounts of his religious experiences and, as he said, employed scribes to record his daily Nauvoo activities. Moreover, his letters portray personal events and his feelings about them, and all this is supplemented by journals that note many parts of the Prophet's Nauvoo discourses, documenting his teachings and inner religious convictions. In general, quality history is shown by the author's careful attention to quality sources. So maximizing Joseph Smith's interpretation of his mission would be the biographical equivalent of the news organization slogan "We report; you decide." With today's accessible avenues of publication, however, it is more realistic to educate discerning readers than to

avoid bias-proof writers. This is illustrated in various types of Joseph Smith history in recent decades, where the following names represent categories of books. Richard Bushman positions himself as a sympathetic believer and is at his best when he allows Joseph Smith to explain Mormon beginnings. Michael Quinn identifies himself similarly but actually writes revisionist biography with at least these questionable methods: (1) assuming that the Prophet falsified his history in order to back-date priesthood events, (2) exaggerating Mormon militarism and programmed violence in the Joseph Smith era, and (3) overgeneralizing by claiming that the young Joseph Smith believed all parts of a “magic world view,” because it existed in his culture or is found in his vicinities. But such cultural typing goes against the Joseph Smith sources that show he was a dissenter, a creative and individualistic religious reformer, who gave God credit for guiding his career. Finally, Joseph Smith biography is also produced by amateur and professional psychologists who radically rework Joseph Smith’s early history. In Dan Vogel’s pre-1831 biography of Joseph Smith, the preface expresses disbelief in divine revelation, and the following six hundred pages sprinkle the dust of myth and self-deception over the Prophet’s early visions and production of the Book of Mormon. Which of the above biographical approaches is more objective? I believe that the Prophet deserves intelligent, aware interpreters who will neither gloss over his weaknesses nor lightly treat his substantial claims of divine calling and direction.

J. DAROWSKI: Even though you said you set it aside, has your background in law played into scholarship you’ve pursued? Has it affected how you’ve exercised judgment in presenting documents and interpretations, and also in understanding someone like Oliver Cowdery, who took up the law himself? What role has your education played in your life?

ANDERSON: In my college years, the saying circulated, “The law is a good background for anything.” Of course that is true,

though life sets practical limits on formal education. As you suggest, my law background has sharpened my ability to do quality history in at least two ways. The first way is in using legal records, which are valuable tools for biography. For instance, land records often locate individuals, and inheritance records give clues to family relationships. Moreover, case notes and files, including records of collections and appeals, are important tracking devices in the life of Oliver Cowdery, showing that he was right in saying he had struggled to gain a good business and a good reputation as an attorney. As you know, the Joseph Smith Papers Project has a legal team, showing that the Prophet's court involvements are important in understanding his life. Second, legal training has trained me to read documents better by identifying context, relevance, and logical connections. American law schools emphasize the case method, meaning that a beginning law student receives a three-year sentence to read statutes and cases, followed by a reprieve for good behavior. Most law classes package a couple of hundred decisions in each case book that is required reading for a given legal area. These cases are not essays on the law but specific explanations of why a judge made a particular decision. This means that the student has a goal of surfing verbiage for a few main points: What are the legal issues in this case? What statute or which cases resolved the question? Finally, what was the actual decision or holding of the court? Everything beyond these questions is basically judicial opinion, what lawyers call "dicta"—relevant but nonbinding comments. These may be useful as points of reasoning for a decision, but only the decision has the force of law. Thus a lawyer is trained to assemble relevant cases and ask what issues they settle, similar to the historian collecting relevant documents and then asking what new information they offer for reconstructing historical events. Thus my law school dean envisioned this process of sorting out useful data when he approved a class in Greek history in the "yard" but said of Greek that "it was not a thinking class." He was partly right.

K. DAROWSKI: Let's talk about your future plans. I asked you about this the other day, and you said it's just to stay alive. Where do you hope your future takes you?

ANDERSON: Present duties easily sidetrack future plans. Right now I am meeting deadlines on the Joseph Smith Papers Project but have future leeway to finish the *Documentary History of Oliver Cowdery*, which we've already discussed. An academic vice president once asked me when I would leave off writing articles and concentrate on books. I still plan to revise early drafts of an article about the coming of Peter, James, and John prior to the organization of the Church. According to the Prophet, John the Baptist promised that higher priesthood would come under the direction of the three Apostles, stating that this authority would be required for confirmation—meaning the laying on of hands for the gift of the Holy Ghost (Joseph Smith—History 1:70–72). To me this means that Joseph Smith said that the higher priesthood had to come before Church organization, for Joseph's history plainly says that the first confirmations into the Church were given that day. Moving to projected books, *Dear Joseph—Dear Emma* has a high priority. Leonard Arrington did not want me to change that title, which will probably remain. About 60 percent has been in fairly finished manuscript form for decades. Though the narrative is built around the couple's letters, I plan a full biography of their marriage.

At an unknown point, I will be given definitive retirement. I think of the recent death of my admired history colleague and friend Davis Bitton. He earned his doctorate from Princeton, and his writings were crisp and professionally done. He wrote his own obituary, closing with a statement of faith: "And I know in whom I have trusted." Believing historians are nonetheless historians. Many of them have the advantage of insight into the transcendent events that are retold in their writings. I recall a narrower perspective of life until marriage, when Carma began to share a new world of color and design that I had largely ignored before that. An ideal historian should view all

aspects of reality, including documented religious experience from firsthand descriptions. My religious experiences of course influence my judgment that such events may be real. Yet as a historian I am not free to alter the written record or, in biblical language, to add or take away from recorded history. On my retirement from teaching, a local reporter asked whether I was an apologist. I simply answered, "Yes." But no doubt I was at fault in not defining what I meant. "Apology" in Greek is an answer, literally a "speaking back," often translated as "defense." Some of my writing is in this form, answering criticisms made without full knowledge of the facts, or answering false accusations. Yet in no case have I knowingly misstated or withheld the truth before the Supreme Judge or the human jury. Davis Bitton reminded us that more is at stake than earthly reputation. Jesus told the Twelve that they would be accountable in heaven for obscuring their religious knowledge on earth. In common with World War II buffs, I scan scores of documents that permit a consistent reconstruction of the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Battle of Midway, or swarming onto the beaches on D-Day. In common with respected Latter-day Saint historians, I study scores of documents that permit a consistent reconstruction of the visions of the Three Witnesses, the examination of the plates by the Eight Witnesses, or the restorations of priesthoods to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery. On all days of judgment, I hope to be recognized both as a careful historian and a thinking believer, one who acted honestly in both roles. To my knowledge I have avoided fanaticism, for I have tried to separate charlatans and self-deceived people from those with genuine religious experience. I hope I have written and will write about Joseph Smith accurately, but not to disguise strong convictions that Mormonism's founding visions occurred and that young Joseph Smith saw the Father and the Son in the Grove. In the name of objectivity, some historians dissect Joseph's multiple accounts of that theophany, claiming that differences show that Joseph Smith invented new details with new versions. On the other hand, I realize that all short accounts of important personal

events are necessarily fragmentary. My wedding day is a humorous example. Sometimes I've repeated wonderful highlights without the counterpoint of how Carma was late because of the hour's travel time from Provo to the Salt Lake Temple, how my sister-in-law left the celestial room, nauseated from waiting for hours because of a misunderstanding in scheduling a General Authority, and how I negligently left expensive, prepaid flowers at the Hotel Utah floral shop. I may write longer versions of that day, which could prove to some that I later invented details to enhance the story. But in this case, later-told particulars are actually residual memories.

I will not apply a different standard to Joseph Smith's recollections of the First Vision. In my judgment, each telling called up different details in reliving an overwhelming experience, the full story of which could hardly be recorded. Joseph said as much at the end of his afternoon discourse on April 7, 1844, written in Thomas Bullock's tight notes: "No man knows my history. I cannot do it. I shall never undertake it. If I had not experienced what I have I should not have known it myself." I agree with my respected colleague Milton V. Backman Jr., who in careful studies shows how each time Joseph narrated the First Vision, he stressed special details relevant to his audience and purpose in narration on that occasion. My confidence that Joseph Smith was a true and truthful prophet comes in part from testing him by many known methods of discovering truth, whether from biblical precedent, historical documentation, or the evidentiary analogies of the current courtroom. Joseph is a credible witness, fully supported in his testimony of core Restoration events by other credible witnesses.