

continue its remarkable career of developing man's potential or whether it and many of its most precious human values will vanish from the scene.

These books ought to be read in conjunction with one another. Both are must reading for those who desire a better understanding of the situations surrounding man's religious efforts at dealing with this crisis. Both books are well written, employing a clear and lucid style, remarkably free from technical jargon given the fact that they were written from a sociological vantage point and that the author says he has employed the conceptual tools of the social scientist.

How Lovely was the Morning

Dean C. Jessee

Joseph Smith's First Vision: The First Vision in its Historical Context. By Milton V. Backman, Jr. Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, Inc., 1971. 209 pp. \$3.50. Dean C. Jessee is on the staff of the Church Historian's Office, Salt Lake City.

Intensive research in the area of Mormon origins in New York in recent years has resulted in a significant addition to the source material available to scholars. One who has contributed significantly to this effort — having done much field work in the area — is Dr. Milton Backman, Jr. of Brigham Young University. In six chapters and an extensive appendix, his latest book, *Joseph Smith's First Vision*, presents valuable information on the historical setting of Mormonism and a synthesis of much that has been written about Joseph Smith's First Vision.

Two chapters trace the expansion of American settlement into western New York from the time of its habitation by the Iroquois Indians to the arrival of the Smith family in the Palmyra area in 1816. One of the main contributions of the book is the detailed picture of the Genesee frontier civilization that became the birthplace of Mormonism.

In "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District," the author considers the religious revivalism that began with the Methodists and spread "among all the sects in that region of country." He observes that "it is difficult to determine precisely what Joseph Smith meant when he said that there was unusual religious excitement in the place where he lived," but he presents evidence to show that there were "substantial increases in church membership in many sections of western New York at the time of the First Vision."

In analyzing the theological arguments that divided Christian churches and precipitated the "war of words and tumult of opinions," as described by Joseph Smith, Dr. Backman identifies the main issues contributing to the conflict under the headings of Baptism, Calvinism vs. Arminianism, The Bible vs. Modern Revelation, Trinitarianism vs. Arianism, and Divine Authority.

Chapter five, entitled "Recitals of the First Vision," contains a brief consideration of the Hurlbut-Howe-Turner charges against the integrity and character of Joseph Smith and his family. The author points to the incon-

sistencies of their sworn statements. "In nearly every instance the accusations were vague and were not documented with essential details or specific examples" (p. 117). An example is the black sheep story allegedly related by William Stafford to D. P. Hurlbut, who claimed that Joseph Smith had discovered a treasure that could only be obtained by leading the sheep with its throat cut around the area to appease an evil spirit. On the occasion described, according to Hurlbut, the sheep did not have "the desired effect" (p. 119). Backman cites the 1880 Kelley interview with William Stafford's son, Dr. John Stafford, who testified that he didn't think the story was true. Backman could also have quoted Joseph Smith's version of the Stafford story in which Joseph stated that in his youth "his father had a fine large watch dog, which bit off an ear from David Stafford's hog, which Stafford had turned into the Smith corn field. Stafford shot the dog, and with six other fellows pitched upon him unawares. And Joseph whipped the whole of them and escaped unhurt." (Joseph Smith, *Diary*, 1 Jan. 1843, as recorded by Willard Richards.)

Dr. Backman concludes that if charges made against the Smith integrity were correct, Lucy, Hyrum, and Samuel "would have been unable to retain their membership in the Western Presbyterian Church until 1830" as they did (p. 120).

In a final chapter the author treats "external evidences" that Joseph Smith was a Prophet and received a visitation from the Father and the Son. He quotes from an "imposing group of witnesses [who] verified the reality of many visions received by the Mormon leader." Leading the list are Oliver Cowdery, David Whitmer, Martin Harris, and Sidney Rigdon, followed by other contemporaries of Joseph Smith.

Ten of the fifteen documents reproduced in the Appendix are accounts of the First Vision as recorded by Joseph Smith or those who heard him relate it. These are the 1832, 1835, 1838, and Wentworth accounts, the first publication of the event by Orson Pratt in England in 1840, a translation from a pamphlet published by Orson Hyde in Germany in 1842, a non-Mormon account based upon an interview with Joseph Smith and published in the *New York Spectator* in 1843, Alexander Neibaur's diary notation of his hearing Joseph relate the incident on 24 May 1844, a discourse of John Taylor on 7 December 1879, and two 1890 reminiscences by Edward Stevenson. The five remaining documents in the Appendix consist of the March 1830 Presbyterian Church record suspending members of the Smith family from their communion, and four early 19th century descriptions of Palmyra, Manchester, and Farmington, New York.

In considering these different accounts of the First Vision three points deserve consideration:

1. In the analysis of Joseph Smith's earliest account of his Vision written in 1832, Frederick G. Williams is listed as the scribe. (p. 155) A closer look at the original document has shown that while Williams wrote the beginning and end of the narrative, Joseph Smith wrote the remainder, including the portion containing the details of his First Vision. This is the only known account of the Vision in his own hand. Most of his writings were dictated, which is not to say that other accounts are less authentic.

2. There are two versions of the 1835 recital of the First Vision. That

reproduced by Dr. Backman in Appendix B is recorded in Joseph Smith's 1835-36 effort to write a history which is found in the back of Volume A-1 of the 1838-39 Manuscript of Joseph's official History. The second version was recorded in the Prophet's 1835-36 Diary by his scribe, Warren Parrish. The existence of these two accounts are reflective of Joseph's effort to keep a personal record at that time. The Diary account is given here for comparison:

. . . while setting in my house between the hours of ten & 11 this morning, a man came in, and introduced himself to me, calling himself by the name of Joshua the Jewish minister, his appearance was something singular, having a beard about 3 inches in length which is quite grey, also his hair is long and considerably silvered with age I should think he is about 50 or 55 years old, tall and strait slender built of thin visage blue eyes, and fair complexion, he wears a sea-green frock coat, & pantaloons of the same, black fur hat with narrow brim, and while speaking frequently shuts his eyes with a scowl on his countenance: I made some enquiry after his name but received no definite answer; we soon commenced talking upon the subject of religion and after I had made some remarks concerning the bible I commenced giving him a relation of the circumstances connected with the coming forth of the Book of Mormon, as follows — being wrought up in mind, respecting the subject of religion and looking at the different systems taught the children of men, I knew not who was right or who was wrong and I considered it of the first importance that I should be right, in matters that involve eternal consequences; being thus perplexed in mind I retired to the silent grove and bowd down before the Lord, under a realising sense that he had said (if the bible be true) ask and you shall receive knock and it shall be opened seek and you shall find and again, if any man lack wisdom let him ask of God who giveth to all men liberally and upbradeth not; information was what I most desired at this time, in the place above stated or in other words I made a fruitless attempt to pray, my tounge seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter, I heard a noise behind me like some person walking towards me, I strove again to pray, but could not the noise of walking seemed to draw nearer, I sprung upon my feet, and looked around, but saw no person or thing that was calculated to produce the noise of walking, I kneeled again my mouth was opened and my tounge liberated, and I called on the Lord in mighty prayer, a pillar of fire appeared above my head, it presently rested down upon me ~~head,~~ and filled me with joy unspeakable, a personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame which was spread all around, and yet nothing consumed, another personage soon appeared like unto the first, he said unto me thy sins are forgiven thee, he testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the Son of God; and I saw many angels in this vision I was about 14 years old when I received this first communication. . . .

3. The "ABC Notes" following the 1838 account of the First Vision in Appendix C may require a word of identification. Since they did not appear in the first printing of the History in the *Times and Seasons* in 1842, critics have regarded them as textual emendations by later historians. However, their location on pages 131-134 of Volume A-1 of Joseph's History manuscript, in the handwriting of Willard Richards, and a note of reference to them in Richards' Diary, clearly date them as having been written in Decem-

ber 1842. The introductory paragraph to Appendix C does not identify these Notes as being different from the narrative of the History, which was written by James Mulholland in 1839. Furthermore, footnote references citing the ABC Notes on pages 20 and 21 of *Joseph Smith's First Vision* make no reference to the volume or page number of these Notes in the manuscript of the History.

Over the years three theories have been raised in an effort to question Joseph Smith's credibility on the subject of his First Vision:

1. *The unprincipled character theory* — that Joseph did not sustain a character worthy of such a magnificent event, as evidenced by the Hurlbut affidavits.

2. *The evolution theory* — that the time-lag between the Vision and its official recording, plus the discrepancies between various accounts of the event, indicate that the story was born late and gradually evolved in complexity.

3. *The misplaced revival theory* — that there was no "unusual excitement" on the subject of religion "in the place" where Joseph lived in 1819-20, but that the revival occurred three years later, which upsets Joseph's recital of facts.

Although not intending a foray into the world of polemics, Dr. Backman presents much evidence that bears upon items one and three, for those who are acquainted with the issues. However, little is written concerning item two, even though "a discussion of the recitals of the First Vision" is promised in the preface. The only consideration of this point is a footnote reference in Appendix A to Joseph's statement in his 1832 narrative that the Vision occurred in the "16th year" of his age. The author suggests that this could as well read "15th year," a point that is somewhat weakened upon close inspection of the original document and Joseph's style of writing a "5" and a "6."

An adequate consideration of the issue of the time-lag and the discrepancies in the accounts would require a careful look at Joseph Smith's effort to write his history and a parallel analysis of what he actually said in the accounts of his First Vision.