

Later in his essay, Duffy moved to a discussion of perspectivism and post-modernism as strategies for promoting the serious study of religion. In this context, he cites George Marsden's work approvingly. What he seems to ignore in his haste to classify me as an objectivist and positivist is that I presented a defense of Marsden's *Soul of the American University* at a session with Marsden at the convention of the American Society for Church History-American Historical Association in 1994, the year of this book's publication. This was long before the published defense of Marsden by Jed Woodworth, Reid Neilsen, and Grant Underwood whom Duffy cites approvingly. I also approve their defense of Marsden, but I find it strange that Duffy should cite theirs and ignore mine unless it was part of his agenda to attack me.

In conclusion, I would call on Duffy to attempt to achieve a greater degree of accuracy in representing my work and that of other historians. Critics like Duffy would do well to adopt the ideals of understanding and honesty as models for their presentations.

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What Is a Revival?

I have read with increasing concern D. Michael Quinn's lengthy online essay defending an 1820 Palmyra "revival" ("Joseph Smith's Experience of a Methodist 'Camp-Meeting' in 1820," *Dialogue Paperless*, E-Paper #3, December 20, 2006, <http://www.dialoguejournal.com>, accessed April 2008); his letter to *Dialogue* ("Filling Gaps and Responding to 'Silences on Mormon History,'" 40, no.

2 [Summer 2007]: ix-x) declaring himself the victor; and Gerry L. Ensley's letter in the spring 2008 issue ("A Rigorous Examination," 41, no. 1 [Spring 2008]: vi-vii) lauding Quinn's "rigorous examination of historical evidence." While I found Quinn's research thorough enough, I think many of his arguments are strained and largely irrelevant.

Quinn's so-called "conservative revisionism" consists of redating the First Vision to the summer of 1820, instead of the early spring as Joseph Smith claimed in his 1838-39 official history. This redating is necessary to make the report in the local *Palmyra Register* of a camp meeting "in the vicinity" of Palmyra Village in June 1820 relevant. Quinn even asserts it was the very meeting that led to Smith's first theophany. He argues that an unusually cold spring caused Smith to misdate his vision. Thus, Quinn attempts to free himself from the text that has informed and restricted previous discussions. In my opinion, such speculation does not justify the certainty with which he then proceeds to criticize both critics and fellow apologists.

Quinn might find it difficult to believe Smith would go into the woods to pray in cold weather, but these were people who cut holes in the ice to baptize. Recounting events that occurred "late in the fall of 1840," Ezra T. Benson, for instance, wrote: "One evening, as the moon shone bright[,] I retired near a grove to pray, there was about one foot of snow upon the ground."¹ We are not talking about snow on the ground in Smith's case, only a temperature in the 50s or 60s. It is perhaps rele-

vant that in a December 1842 addition to his history, Smith said that, upon returning home after his vision, he spoke to his mother “as I leaned up to the fire piece.”² Some might find that image difficult to accept for June 1820. Apparently unaware that Quinn’s definition of “revival” is different from those he criticizes, Ensley naively concludes: “We may now safely ignore historical criticism that no such religious revivals occurred in Palmyra until 1824.”

There is good reason both Walters and his apologetic critics either dropped or ignored the June 1820 Palmyra camp meeting. It did not fit their criteria of evidence. Walters had challenged Smith’s claim that there were “great multitudes” of converts joining the competing sects in Palmyra in 1820. This was the definition of “revival” that informed that discussion; and for Quinn to change the definition to include any religious excitement, especially a camp meeting, regardless of the amount of conversions, is unfair. No one, not even Walters, claimed Joseph Smith could not have attended a camp meeting—just not the *one* he described in his history. So, despite Quinn’s excessively repeated and annoying accusations, Walters was not being dishonest when he downplayed the 1820 camp meeting; nor had the apologists “wrongfully conceded” the point when they expanded their search for evidence of “revivals” beyond Palmyra.

Ensley is impressed that “Quinn’s evidence shows not only an extensive Methodist (exactly as Smith stated) Palmyra ‘camp meeting’ religious revival in 1820, but also an interdenominational (Methodist and others) Palmyra camp meeting revival in 1818 as well.” How-

ever, a Methodist camp meeting occurring in Palmyra in June 1820 is not “exactly” as Smith claimed. According to Smith, the “religious excitement” that preceded and motivated his 1820 vision involved all the sects and led to his mother and other family members joining the Presbyterian church, which even Quinn admits probably did not happen until 1824.

Of course, Smith did not mention either an 1818 or 1824 revival. Rather than seeing Smith as pushing elements from 1824 back to 1820, Quinn speculates that Smith considered the 1824 revival a continuation of the 1820 camp meeting and therefore lumped all the details together. However, it was in the wake of the confusion created by competing sects and the pressure he felt to join a particular church, as his mother and siblings had done, that led to his prayer in the woods. Hence, in his conversation with his mother over the “fire piece,” he said: “I told my mother I have learned for myself that Presbyterianism is not true” (*Early Mormon Documents*, 1:143), which is significant since Lucy dated her membership to shortly after her oldest son’s death in November 1823 (1:306–8). Considering how the anachronistic elements work in the narrative, Quinn’s speculation doesn’t solve anything.

Significantly, Joseph Smith’s 1832 history fails to mention a revival and confusion over which sect to join as motivation for praying. Instead, he was motivated by a need for salvation and forgiveness of sins. This need posed a problem to him because he had already concluded all the sects were apostate. Rather than trying to find the unifying

historical truth behind these texts, I think it is more beneficial to treat them as literary and rhetorical works and explore possible reasons for this shift in meaning.

Ultimately, after all his unnecessary and unfair attacks on Walters's character, Quinn agrees with Walters's main finding—that Joseph Smith's 1838–39 First Vision story contains elements from the 1824–25 Palmyra revival. That's more than some of the early apologetic defenders were willing to concede to Walters. Although Walters may have overstated its significance (which advocates on both sides of the debate have done), his observation about the text and its relationship to verifiable historical facts remains essentially legitimate.

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1. "A brief history of Ezra Taft Benson, written by himself," copied into Manuscript History of Brigham Young by clerk Robert L. Campbell, 16:55–82 for July 16, 1846, quotation from p. 65. Holograph at LDS Church Library. This account is reproduced in Elden Jay Watson, ed., *Manuscript History of Brigham Young, 1801–1844* (Salt Lake City: Smith Secretarial Service, 1968), 250, and serialized in *The Instructor* 80 (March 1945): 103. Benson's British mission journal records that he wrote his autobiography between June 11 and September 25, 1857, at the request of assistant Church historian Wilford Woodruff and that Elder O. F. Jones helped him write it. Photocopy and microfilm of diary in LDS Church library.

2. Added by Willard Richards to Manuscript History, Book A-1, Note B; reproduced in Dan Vogel, *Early Mormon Documents*, 5 vols. (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1996–2003), 1:143.