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Abstract Response to *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* (2005), by Richard Lyman Bushman.

Two Stories—One Faith

Louis Midgley

Response to Richard Lyman Bushman, with the assistance of Jed Woodworth. *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling*. New York: Knopf, 2005. xxiv + 740 pp., with sources cited and index. $35.00, hardcover; $18.95, paperback.

> God's revealing Himself to man, His addressing man, is not merely known through traditions going back to the remote past and is therefore now "merely believed" but is genuinely known through present experience which every human can have if he does not refuse himself to it. This experience is not a kind of self-experience which every human being can have, of the actualization of a human potentiality, of the human mind coming into its own, into what it desires or is naturally inclined to, but something undesired, coming from outside, going against man's grain.[1]

I had previously been invited by my associates to comment on Richard Bushman's biography of Joseph Smith, which has come to be known by its subtitle *Rough Stone Rolling*. I thought that I had accomplished this assignment in an essay entitled "Knowing Brother

1. Leo Strauss, "Preface to Spinoza's Critique of Religion," in *Liberalism: Ancient and Modern* (New York: Basic Books, 1968), 232. This was originally published as the "Preface to the English Translation" of a book by Strauss entitled *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1965), 8.

Joseph Again."[2] My colleagues, it seems, did not agree—I had, they explained, been too subtle. This opinion shocked me; I have never before been accused of subtlety. It was pointed out that I never mentioned Richard Bushman or his book in my earlier essay. But I did not think that was necessary since I had addressed the nagging questions—the misgivings—that some of the Saints may have about *Rough Stone Rolling,* as well as the kinds of things fashioned by critics of Joseph Smith. In addition, I had set out what I believe is a compelling argument for why Latter-day Saints should be concerned about Joseph Smith's life and times since both the ground and content of the faith of the Saints are essentially historical. I had also demonstrated that believers are fully warranted in writing about the Mormon past from within the categories of faith, and hence we need not cave in to the persistent demands that our history must be done in secular terms.

The Beginnings

Harvard-educated, Bushman began his teaching career at Brigham Young University. But he soon shifted to teaching at Brown, Boston, and Delaware before ending as Gouverneur Morris Professor of History at Columbia University. He is known and highly respected within professional circles. More than any other Latter-day Saint, he has risen to the top of the American history profession. With his emphasis on early American history, no one has ever been better equipped or situated to write the biography of Joseph Smith.[3] In addition, Bushman is a skillful literary craftsman and an especially adroit essayist.

I first encountered Bushman after graduate school, when we both began our teaching careers at BYU—his career blossomed from there. He was then busy building on his studies at Harvard by probing Puritan

2. See Louis Midgley, "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," *FARMS Review* 18/1 (2006): xi–lxiv.

3. See, for example, Richard Bushman's *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690–1765* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967); *King and People in Provincial Massachusetts* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985); and *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, and Cities* (New York: Knopf, 1992).

religiosity. He also surveyed various psychological theories in an effort to see what one could learn from that literature to better understand both individuals and movements. He sought to sharpen his own ability to understand empathetically what drives individuals to hold this or that opinion or to act in different ways. However, he has not thought it prudent to ground his effort to understand the past in one or another of the various competing theories found in the social sciences. No psychological theory can possibly unravel the supposed secret springs of human motivations and actions. Efforts to penetrate the way people project themselves leave us in the end with our own projection and hence also with a mere question-begging confirmation of the skeptical theory we have chosen to employ.

Whatever else one might say about Bushman, it is clear that he has been, from his days as a missionary, a devoted believer. I believe he operates on something like the assumption, to borrow language from David Hume, that "reason is, and ought to be the slave of the passions."[4] If we begin to fathom the passions at work in others (and ourselves)—our expectations, hopes, deepest desires—we will better comprehend the reasons we and others give to justify our deeds and hence also what really drives the arguments we set out, as well as the strength and weakness of our understanding of the drama here below.

Bushman has a temperament reflecting both his deepest convictions, as well as the qualities of his soul. He is irenic at least most of the time. He shies away from confrontations. His approach to intellectual and social history is rarely if ever directly argumentative. Instead, he is constantly probing for a larger and deeper understanding. By this I mean that he strives to see why people argue the way they do. Where others may focus directly and even entirely on the details of arguments others advance, Bushman strives to figure out what drives the arguments or what motivates the framing of an explanation, objection, or criticism. He is less concerned with the specific details of arguments. He seeks to figure out why individuals position themselves in the larger ebb and flow of ideological or intellectual fads and fashions.

4. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature,* ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (Oxford: Clarendon, 1888), 415.

He has stressed, for example, the place deep in the hearts and minds of both sectarian and secular critics of Joseph Smith, both then and now, wherein lie the powerful background assumptions derived from Enlightenment skepticism about divine things and fear of fanaticism. His approach to severe critics of Joseph Smith and the faith of the Saints is to unravel sympathetically the deeper reasons behind their arguments and objections. I am not insisting that Bushman does not confront arguments or that he does not provide reasoned responses to the arguments offered by others, whether Latter-day Saint or not. Instead, I want to stress that he is not confrontational or argumentative in the way in which he scrutinizes claims and criticisms or fashions accounts of the past.

When I encountered Bushman in 1968, I quickly came to the conclusion that he would eventually use his gifts to write a biography of Joseph Smith. I was convinced that he would not be able to avoid doing this, given his training, interests, intellectual gifts, and solid faith. I can think of no other Latter-day Saint better fitted for such a task. There is simply no one in the LDS community more qualified to undertake such a daunting endeavor. In 1984 my expectations were at least partially realized. Soon after Leonard Arrington was made head of the nascent History Department of the Church, a series of studies of the Mormon past was commissioned. Bushman was asked to write the key initial volume.[5] The result was the eventual publication of *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (hereafter *Beginnings*).[6] This book was well received by faithful Latter-day Saints. In it he was able to deal effectively with what enemies of the church have long insisted

5. A decision was eventually made to pay the sixteen authors and cancel the series. Several of the volumes in this series were eventually published, some of which were outstanding. See, for example, F. LaMond Tullis, *Mormons in Mexico: The Dynamics of Faith and Culture* (Logan, UT: Utah State University, 1987); R. Lanier Britsch, *Unto the Isles of the Sea: A History of Latter-day Saints in the Pacific* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986); and Milton V. Backman, *The Heavens Resound: A History of the Latter-day Saints in Ohio, 1830–1838* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1983). This move was not, as critics constantly wrongly claim, an instance of suppression or censorship. All of those authors were free to publish their work, if they cared to do so and if they had completed a viable manuscript.

6. Richard L. Bushman, *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984).

were fatal flaws in Joseph Smith's early ministry. On the crucial first period in Joseph Smith's life, Bushman surpassed all other previous accounts.[7]

The publication of *Beginnings* came just as word was leaked to the press by enemies of the church about the notorious Salamander letter—Mark Hofmann's most famous Mormon forgery. When Bushman's attention was drawn to that strange letter, he merely tinkered with a few words on one page. He thereby avoided being sucked into desolate speculation about the historical grounds of the faith of the Saints. His book was thus not flawed by entanglement with the rabid nonsense generated by the Hofmann forgeries. There is no large, salamander-shaped hole in the middle of *Beginnings,* as there is in other books written by authors in thrall to Hofmann's forgeries.[8]

Beginnings became an important source of information as well as of understanding for Latter-day Saints (or interested non-LDS) of Joseph Smith's controversial and hence crucial early history. Those Latter-day Saints who were familiar with this book, including the Brethren, thought highly of it. One bit of evidence that this was the case is that *Beginnings* was included in the packet of materials given by the Church of Jesus Christ to libraries in the United States and English-speaking Canada, as well as in Australia and New Zealand. I became familiar with this matter in 2000 when I was asked to assist in placing some of these packets in university libraries in Auckland, New Zealand. I doubt that *Beginnings* would have been present in that packet if the Brethren were not pleased with it.

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7. The most prominent competing accounts are to be found in Fawn M. Brodie, *No Man Knows My History,* 2nd ed. rev. and enl. (New York: Knopf, 1971), and *Dale Morgan on Early Mormonism: Correspondence and a New History,* ed. John Phillip Walker (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1986). This volume included the edited fragments of the supposedly definitive account of Joseph Smith that Morgan worked on for nearly two decades. He never got past rough drafts of the first chapters. Bushman covered this same period in an obviously superior manner in *Beginnings*. For details, see Gary F. Novak, "'The Most Convenient Form of Error': Dale Morgan on Joseph Smith and the Book of Mormon," *FARMS Review of Books* 8/1 (1996): 152.

8. For an example of a book deeply indebted to and hence also flawed by the mischief of Hofmann's forgeries and related lies, see Grant H. Palmer's *An Insider's View of Mormon Origins* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 2002). For details, see Louis Midgley, "*Pry*ing into Palmer," *FARMS Review* 15/2 (2003): 365–410.

For a scholarly book written by a faithful, competent Latter-day Saint, *Beginnings* sold well. But it did not reach more than a few of the Saints. And the story Bushman told ended just after there began to be a tiny community of Saints—that is, soon after the events leading to the recovery and publication of the Book of Mormon, the experience of the witnesses, the restoration of the priesthood, and the reception of the initial revelations. Although I very much admired *Beginnings* and recommended it whenever I could, I was also annoyed that it stopped where it did. I was, therefore, delighted when it was announced that Bushman would write a full biography of Joseph Smith.

In *Beginnings,* Bushman had described the crucial founding events. I have argued elsewhere that, if the story of the visits to Joseph Smith by a heavenly messenger and the subsequent recovery through the gift and power of God of the Book of Mormon, as well as the events that launched the fledgling Church of Christ—those crucial *first steps*—hold up to critical scrutiny, then nothing "can really detract from the miracle of the whole."[9] *Beginnings* contains a remarkable account of those *first steps*.

Not everyone, of course, was pleased with *Beginnings*. Some critics expressed misgivings because they noted the absence of trendy explanations drawn from the social sciences or appeals to a thoroughly secular religious studies literature. Those with a strong emotional investment in picturing Brother Joseph as something other than a genuine seer and authentic prophet were displeased with *Beginnings*. Criticism of *Beginnings* was found on the margins of the Mormon intellectual community, but outside the circle of faith—from those I call cultural Mormons—and, of course, from within the Community of Christ (then RLDS). Virtually no one in the larger secular environment knew enough or cared sufficiently to form a coherent opinion. This can be seen with responses to *Beginnings* but even more so with *Rough Stone Rolling.* Some of the same people on the margins of the Latter-day Saint

9. See Louis Midgley, "The First Steps," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): xi–lv. The language quoted is taken from Martin E. Marty, "Two Integrities: An Address to the Crisis in Mormon Historiography," *Journal of Mormon History* 10 (1983): 9, and is quoted at xvi.

intellectual community who objected to Bushman in 1984 have again been hostile to *Rough Stone Rolling.*[10]

Stories Rather Than Formal Theology

In *Rough Stone Rolling* Bushman incorporated the bulk of five of the six chapters that constituted *Beginnings*. In these chapters he examined the Smith family background, Joseph's first visions, the recovery of the Book of Mormon, as well as the controversy it generated, and the legal organization of the Church of Christ. This previously published, calm, deftly written, judicious account augured well for what has now become a full biography of Brother Joseph. The final chapter in *Beginnings,* entitled "The Restoration of All Things,"[11] was not included in *Rough Stone Rolling,* except for an anecdote involving Newel K. Whitney (see *Rough Stone Rolling,* 127), though the other five chapters, with some editing and additions, constitute a fifth of *Rough Stone Rolling.* Since *Beginnings* essentially ended with the legal organization of the Church of Christ, "The Restoration of All Things" appears to have been an essay that Bushman tacked onto his 1984 account of Joseph Smith, and hence it did not fit the full biography.

In that fine ten-page essay that concludes *Beginnings,* Bushman contrasts the faith of those gathered into a tiny community of believers by the Book of Mormon (and other early revelations) with the formal theology of the Disciples of Christ as set forth first by Thomas Campbell and then by his son Alexander, who sought to restore a primitive Christianity as they imagined it to be in the New Testament.

10. See, for example, Marvin S. Hill, "Richard L. Bushman—Scholar and Apologist," *Journal of Mormon History* 11 (1984): 125–33. As sour and sarcastic as ever, as well as confused and misinformed, Hill is also unrelentingly critical of Bushman's full biography of Joseph Smith in "By Any Standard, a Remarkable Book," *Dialogue* 39/3 (2006): 155–63. In the last paragraph (p. 162) of what is a sustained attack on *Rough Stone Rolling,* Hill indicates that he does "not wish to end [his] review on an overly negative note. Despite the fact that Bushman's 'look' at Joseph comes up markedly short at times and he does not always examine controversial issues carefully, his book suggests that thought about the Prophet has matured among some faithful Latter-day Saints." Latter-day Saint scholars, of course, have made significant advancements in understanding Joseph Smith, but not in the directions suggested by those infected by the culture of unbelief.

11. See, "The Restoration of All Things," in Bushman, *Beginnings,* 179–88.

One crucial difference between Alexander Campbell and Joseph Smith, from Bushman's perspective, was that Campbell was fully "a child of the Enlightenment, ordering, rationalizing, systematizing." Thus

> when Alexander Campbell pulled his teachings together into a treatise in 1835, he explained how he had arrived at his principles: "The object of this volume is to place before the community in a plain, definite and perspicuous style, the *capital principles* which have been elicited, argued out, developed, and sustained in a controversy of *twenty-five years*, by the tongues and pens of those who rallied under the banner of the Bible alone."[12]

Joseph Smith began his ministry by recovering the Book of Mormon and then portions of the words of Moses (and also Enoch). Hence what Brother Joseph offered was something radically different from Alexander Campbell's "restoration." For those early Saints, "the sacred history of the past at that point flowed into the Mormon present,"[13] just as it does now. What Joseph restored encourages the Saints to enter a world not unlike that recorded in the scriptures. For the Saints the rhythm of historical events described in the Bible has not ended but is still taking place now. We must, however, have the desire and then the eyes to see. For the first Saints, it was the recovery by a strange means of the tragic story of the Lehi colony and then the visions of Moses and Enoch, and also what those stories taught those first faithful about the heavens being open, that grounded their faith. This made those earliest members of the Church of Christ radically different from the Campbellites, who merely attempted a dogmatic theology fashioned by disputation from the *Bible alone*.

The Book of Mormon and the subsequent Book of Moses (with its account of Enoch's ascent to heaven) are dramatically different from Campbellite theology, which was an effort to distill "the essence of the Gospel from the scriptures, turning Bible stories and preachments into

12. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 183. Note the common sectarian Protestant slogan "Bible alone."

13. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 186.

an orderly set of principles. Joseph Smith's revelations, on the other hand, made new sacred narratives that were themselves the foundation of belief."[14] The faith of the Saints both then and now rests on a story of the dramatic opening of the heavens to a rough young fellow who was also a mighty seer, whose revelations took the imaginations of the Saints all the way back to before this world and hence to a grand council in the heavens and then forward to a future that transcends the turmoil of this world. "The greatest error," according to Bushman, "would be to mistake these narratives from ancient times as mere objects of curiosity, revealing a Mormon taste for the mysteries of antiquity."[15]

As indicated by Bushman, what separated Campbellite religiosity from the faith of those gathered into the Church of Christ

> was not so much the Gospel Mormons taught, which in many respects resembled other Christians' teachings, but what they believed had happened—to Joseph Smith, to Book of Mormon characters, and to Moses and Enoch. Mormons ever afterward were unable to take much interest in *formal theology or systematizing treatises* like Campbell's. No such attempts achieved the place in Mormon faith that creeds assumed in other churches. The core of Mormon belief was a conviction about actual events. The test of faith was not adherence to a certain confession of faith but belief that Christ was resurrected, that Joseph Smith saw God, that the Book of Mormon was true history, that Peter, James and John restored the apostleship. Mormonism was history, not philosophy.[16]

Of course, those first "Mormon missionaries taught a familiar Gospel."[17] What then was the crucial difference between what Joseph Smith offered and sectarian theology? Bushman answers correctly that "Mormon principles came by revelation."[18] Thus, according to Bushman,

14. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 187.
15. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 187.
16. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 187–88, emphasis added.
17. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 180.
18. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 183.

> The Prophet showed no sign of wavering when exposed to the scorn of Palmyra's rationalist editors and to the criticism of Campbell himself. Joseph told of the visits of angels, of direct inspiration, of a voice in the chamber of Father Whitmer, without embarrassment. He prized the Urim and Thummim and the seerstone, never repudiating them even when the major charge against him was that he used magic to find buried money. His world was not created by Enlightenment rationalism with its deathly aversion to superstition.[19]

The visions and the revelations to and through Joseph Smith do not provide an account of the nature of things but are, instead, a history written from the perspective of covenants and commandment (and hence also of the blessings and cursings associated with obedience or disobedience), and not formal theology or even bits of information to be assembled by us into a catalogue of beliefs. The texts constituting our scriptures should not be seen as badly done philosophy that we should now work at sorting out. Put more bluntly, we live by stories, which include revelations to seers and prophets, and also to those who wish to make and keep covenants that may transform us into the seed of Christ, if we endure in faith. Such is not the product of learned disputations, and it is not a formal system. The revelations invite us, instead, to enter into the ongoing history of salvation and exaltation.[20] The point is to invite us to participate in the kingdom of God not merely then and there in a remote past, but also in a proximate here and now.

For those who want everything explained, everything nailed down, stories may seem the wrong way to go. So there is an urge among some Saints to turn stories into at least dogmatic theology. There are also those who tend to see the scriptures as badly set out formal or systematic theology. They want the contents and culturally conditioned stories from several parts of the world over long periods of time to yield

19. Bushman, *Beginnings,* 184.

20. Terryl Givens has set this out in some detail in his remarkable *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

theoretical knowledge of the nature of things. They insist on harmonizing fragmentary stories—they want Mormon Doctrine. I am not troubled by the incompleteness and unfinished character of stories found in our scriptures and elsewhere; the disarray of these stories does not offend me. If I have read Terryl Givens and Bushman correctly, they see in our Joseph Smith/Book of Mormon founding story and in what flows from it an invitation by God for us to enter into the very same world found in the scriptures—a world pulsing with divine powers, one in which we struggle to keep commandments and find favor in God's sight and so forth, and one in which by our uncoerced decisions—our faith and repentance—we become partners with God in a glorious endeavor. God does not compel us but invites us, and, if we respond, he will both test and assist us since he loves us and desires that we become like him. We discover that we are engaged in a struggle in which there are real losses and real gains. This larger story is, of course, rough, unpolished, and unfinished since it continues even now as we face our own Liberty Jail or Heartbreak Ridge. The subplots and details are also necessarily couched in the language of the people who experienced them. Our explanations of our encounters with the divine are always something less than the experience itself. We are invited to live in an enchanted world filled with real dangers, wonders, and also hope.

"A Developing History"

Bushman, I believe, is on solid ground in his explanation at the end of *Beginnings*. Put bluntly, the Saints live by—and in—stories[21] rather than by creeds, confessions, or formal theologies, whether dogmatic or systematic or otherwise. Some critics have complained that we do not have a theology but instead a history that takes the place of theology

21. For my views on this issue, see Louis Midgley, "Theology," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* 4:1475; "Directions That Diverge: 'Jerusalem and Athens' Revisited," *FARMS Review of Books* 11/1 (1999): 27–87; "Faulty Topography," *FARMS Review of Books* 14/1–2 (2002): 158–70. See also Daniel C. Peterson, "'What Has Athens to Do with Jerusalem?': Apostasy and Restoration in the Big Picture," *FARMS Review of Books* 12/2 (2000): xi–lii; and James E. Faulconer, "Rethinking Theology: The Shadow of the Apocalypse," in this number of the *FARMS Review,* pages 175–99.

or carefully worked-out creedal statements. Others, however, who are aware of this, have not made it an object of derision. For example, Martin Marty, a rather liberal Lutheran churchman and author whom Jan Shipps lionized as one of the current "deans of American religious history,"[22] read an address at Westminster College in Salt Lake City on 20 March 1989 in which he argued that "Mormons have not made much of doctrine, of theology: they especially live as chosen and covenanted people in part of a developing history."[23] Marty thus also recognizes that "much is at stake when the story is threatened, as it potentially could have been when forged documents concerning Mormon origins agitated the community and led to tragedy a few years ago."[24] Beginning even before the publication of the Book of Mormon, our critics have insisted that in various, often competing, ways we are captives of a superstition that corrupts our understanding.

Marty maintains that we live by stories—all of us.[25] A people stripped of the memory of its past ceases to have an identity. Our individual memory of who and what we are is our own story. In addition, as communal beings we have an identity that also necessarily involves a story or perhaps a bundle of sometimes even conflicting and competing stories. What Marty calls "religious communities" also live by stories. As these stories fade, the vitality of faith melts away. This can now be seen taking place in Europe and the United Kingdom, as well as in intellectual circles in the United States.

Two Stories

I have entitled this essay "Two Stories—One Faith." The first of the two stories is, of course, the story of Joseph Smith's encounters

22. Jan Shipps, "Mormonism from Different Perspectives," in *The Mormon History Association's Tanner Lectures,* ed. Dean L. May and Reid L. Neilson (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 274. She claims, quite correctly, that Marty has "earned enormous respect within the academy."

23. Martin E. Marty, *We Might Know What to Do and How to Do It: On the Usefulness of the Religious Past* (Salt Lake City: Office of the President, Westminster College, 1989), 12.

24. Marty was, of course, referring to the forgeries of Mark Hofmann and to Hofmann's efforts to hide his chicanery. Marty, *We Might Know,* 12.

25. Marty, *We Might Know,* 12.

with a heavenly messenger, of a massive history of the travels and travails in a strange land by a portion of the covenant people of God. This story also involves Joseph Smith actually possessing real artifacts from the distant past—including metal plates containing that previously unknown history, as well as what in the Book of Mormon are called Interpreters (or Directors)—two seer stones.[26] This is only the beginning of what, to those outside the circle of faith, often seems absurd—a strange, impossible story. But the fact is that this story grounds the faith of the Saints.

The faith of the Saints is both grounded on and consists of *two stories,* one of which centers on the founding events—the recovery of the Book of Mormon and so forth—while the other larger story consists of a glimpse of a cosmic and then a fully redemptive history. The first story concerns a heavenly messenger tutoring Joseph Smith and preparing him to recover a previously unknown history we know as the Book of Mormon. What flows from the first story is another story of complexity and rich detail. Its recovery gradually opened for Joseph and then for the Saints a plan vast in scope that looks back to a deep past where there was once a war in heaven (that continues even now here below). This larger second story thus begins with a grand council, with fierce debates in which we were once even observers or participants, then our own mortal existence understood as a probation, with the possibility of an eventual glorious return to the presence of God in the future. The larger story rests on the truth of the initial grounding story—they are not separable. One cannot pick and choose what one likes in the second story while rejecting the grounding and founding in the first story.[27]

Marty argues that such stories have a history-like character but are actually both more and less than what we currently imagine constitutes history. According to Marty, standing behind Jewish communal identity is the story of "how this God chose Israel and covenanted

26. The Saints eventually called this artifact a Urim and Thummim, but since Joseph had to return it to the heavenly messenger, he ended up using in its place his own seer stone, which the early Saints also called Urim and Thummim.

27. As, for example, it appears Grant Palmer wants to do. He claims to be fond of the idea of an eternal married relationship, while insisting that Joseph Smith just made everything up and then lied about doing this.

with the nation. This was a moral God, whose judgments were to fall on Egypt and Assyria," though divine judgments often "fell most strongly on the chosen and covenanted people."[28] Latter-day Saints will recognize this story since they share much of its contents. This story and the vehicles through which it is preserved, even for those many who now tend to explain away the very idea of God "as a projection, an illusion, an invention to fill social needs" (lifting explanations from Sigmund Freud and Karl Marx and their disciples), still provide a foil against which their Jewish identity is formed and preserved.[29] Marty also points out that Shi'ite and Sunni Muslims live by their own similar but also competing stories. "Christians similarly live by story. They see God's activity in the events, words, works, circumstances, and effects of Jesus Christ and tell the story of his death and resurrection as constitutive of the faith that forms their community."[30] Marty also recognizes that all forms of faith with historical content and grounding face the corrosive impact of modernity—that is, pervasive post-Enlightenment skepticism, especially in elite circles, about divine things, as well as fear of fanaticism and superstition.[31]

Living in the Story

The Saints, I believe, have been able to enter a delightful world much like that described in our scriptures, though like everyone else, unfortunately, we still tend to have one foot in Babylon, even if it is not currently known by that name. The Saints have often opened their hearts and minds and entered into an enchanted world in which the divine is present. The Book of Mormon and the story of its recovery make this possible for the Saints. In this and other ways the faith of the Saints, if and when it is genuine, is historical—that is, involves stories that form its ground but that also invite everyone to have their

28. Marty, *We Might Know,* 10.
29. Marty, *We Might Know,* 10.
30. Marty, *We Might Know,* 11.
31. I have dealt with the historical elements in the faith of Christians in "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," xiv–xvi.

own place in a story not entirely unlike that which they encounter in the scriptures.

Every effort we make to forget or ignore our past only opens the door to disillusionment among the Saints, especially when those outside the circle of faith present elements of our past in a distorted way. It is far better that faithful Latter-day Saints present the rich details of our history rather than dissidents, cultural Mormons, or sectarian or secular critics. Young people are especially vulnerable to having their faith disturbed, if and when they discover elements in our past that we have ignored or, for whatever reason, neglected to set forth for them. The Internet, if not the printing press, the bookstore, and the library, has made almost everything—including, of course, the gutter and the sewer—accessible to anyone with a computer. I believe that we cannot and should not hide or be embarrassed by details about the Mormon past. Of course our history is not the story of perfect people. We are all faltering and imperfect. It is far better for someone like Bushman, whatever flaws there might be in *Rough Stone Rolling,* to have dealt as well as he could with the rich details in Joseph Smith's career than for these to be brandished before us by our sworn enemies.

If Bushman is right, many of the early Saints learned that someone who was a visionary had through the gift and power of God recovered the Book of Mormon, which contains the fulness of the gospel—that is, the absolute necessity of faith (understood as trust) in Jesus as Messiah or Christ, baptism, repentance (understood as turning or returning to God), the gift of the Holy Spirit and enduring to the end, all part of a plan set out in the beginning and pointing the faithful to a glorious future.[32] Some of those early Saints may not have even known Joseph Smith's name. It was the message—the really good news in this otherwise disconsolate world—that was primary. This is still true. The

32. See Noel B. Reynolds, "The True Points of My Doctrine," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/2 (1996): 26–56; M. Gerald Bradford and Larry E. Dahl, "Doctrine: Meaning, Source, and History of Doctrine," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* 1:393–97; and Louis Midgley, "Prophetic Messages or Dogmatic Theology? Commenting on the Book of Mormon: A Review Essay," *Review of Books on the Book of Mormon* 1 (1989): 92–113, on what is meant by doctrine in the Book of Mormon, and hence on what constitutes the gospel and its fulness.

Book of Mormon seems to have been for the Saints mostly a sign—evidence—that the heavens were once again open and the authentic gifts of the Holy Spirit were again available to those who wished to enter into covenants in which they could, if faithful—that is, if they endured to the end—be sanctified and thereby become the children or seed of the Holy One of Israel, who would then be their Father.

The Seven-Year Travail

Bushman had already earned considerable credibility as a historian. In order for him to retain credibility within the historical profession, especially with those who are inclined to be critics of Mormon things, he had to demonstrate that he was aware of and had confronted as well as he could every question and objection a diverse non-LDS audience might have. Since the Saints are largely unaware of these criticisms, it was imperative for him to instruct the Saints while also responding to a variety of skeptics. In writing a biography of Joseph Smith, he had to master in a mere seven years as well as he could what he believed were the most relevant portions of the enormous primary and secondary literature on Joseph Smith and Mormon origins, as well as the literature on the cultural setting and controversies in which those events took place. Obviously the fewer the sources, and the less controversial the person, the easier it would be to write a biography. In dealing with Joseph Smith, one must face the complexity of the background and cultural setting of the prophet.

A major hurdle for Bushman was carefully identifying and then probing the richness of Joseph Smith's fourteen-year ministry. Joseph experienced and accomplished a vast number of things in such a very short time—a mere fourteen years! For anyone over forty, that number might come as a shock. One is led to ask: did all that happen in a mere fourteen years? It is a bit ironic that, with all the technology currently available and as much assistance as anyone could possibly want or need, it still required seven years for Bushman to tell Joseph's story. Those who have not attempted to write social or intellectual history may not appreciate the difficulty of undertaking a biography of Joseph Smith.

Possible Latter-day Saint Concerns

Only a tiny minority of Latter-day Saints have followed the efforts of scholars to sort out the details concerning the life of Joseph Smith or of the efforts of our critics to pull the church from its historical foundations by picking on this or that detail. Some of the Saints might be troubled by certain things they find in *Rough Stone Rolling* since they may not have previously been aware of this or that detail about Joseph Smith's career. When the Saints encounter *Rough Stone Rolling,* they may for the first time face details with which they are quite unfamiliar. Some might be uncomfortable with Bushman having dealt with difficult issues; even though they are themselves more or less aware of these matters, they may wish he had not addressed them. They may even believe that mentioning some things might harm the faith of others. I thought that I had already addressed all or most of these in "Knowing Brother Joseph Again."[33]

Much like technology generally, the Internet is both a curse and a blessing. It makes possible the proliferation of anti-Mormon Web sites and also of various lists, boards, and blogs, all at best of mixed quality. But it has also opened the door to sophisticated defenses of the faith and the Saints. Even those striving hard to advance an anti-Mormon agenda have ended up in desperation posting links that unravel the very literature they seek to promote. Where once, and not too long ago, the conversation on Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims was largely confined to crude anti-Mormon potboilers or to magazines known only to a few of the Saints and to even fewer of their enemies, now the Internet has made much of the primary and secondary literature available to anyone who has access to a computer and the ability to use a search engine. So it is no longer possible for either friend or foe to ignore issues.

Before the Internet, Bushman had been able to deal with all the presumably sticky issues involving Joseph Smith in *Beginnings*. Despite the critics, his account has held up. Why then is there concern about *Rough Stone Rolling*? Never before has a book by an LDS scholar

33. "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," xii–xiv, xvi–xxix.

immediately reached such a large audience. What may trouble a few of the Saints about *Rough Stone Rolling* are such things as his candid accounts of polygamy or his willingness to picture the Prophet with passions. Some may ask why he had to bring up such matters. Some might actually prefer a two-dimensional cardboard figure. They may prefer to believe, though they must know better, that Joseph knew everything from the moment of his first encounter with a heavenly messenger or that he was never perplexed or at a loss for understanding, that he was always in full command of every situation, a model of emotional self-control, and hence that he would never manifest hostility. But the textual record clearly shows otherwise. And the story one tells must be grounded on the textual record and not on what we might wish or imagine. It is an obvious mistake to insist on turning Joseph Smith into the image of what we may now think a prophet must be. Joseph Smith was not omniscient, and he clearly does not fit our current idealized model of human perfection; he was also not inerrant or infallible. He was, as I indicated in "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," both less than we might imagine and also much more. And Bushman has it right, Brother Joseph was a "rough stone rolling."

Joseph was also both a seer as well as a prophet—hence more than an ordinary village visionary. Sections of our Doctrine and Covenants were received by him in a strange, entirely unconventional way—by looking at his seer stone, just as he had done in dictating the Book of Mormon to scribes.[34] He also dictated revelations in which both

34. Sections of the Doctrine and Covenants in which the Urim and Thummim (seer stone at this point) played a role include 3, 6–7, 10–11, and 14–17. A correspondent of the *Chicago Tribune,* reporting on an interview with David Whitmer (published 17 December 1885), wrote: "In order to give privacy to the proceeding a blanket, which served as a portiere, was stretched across the family living room to shelter the translators and the plates from the eye of any who might call at the house while the work was in progress. . . . it was not for the purpose of concealing the plates or the translator from the eyes of the amanuensis. In fact, Smith was at no time hidden from his collaborators, and the translation was performed in the presence of not only the persons mentioned, but of the entire Whitmer household and several of Smith's relatives besides." Lyndon W. Cook, ed., *David Whitmer Interviews: A Restoration Witness* (Orem, UT: Grandin Book, 1991), 173. William E. McLellin apparently visited Oliver Cowdery's widow, who certified that "Joseph never had a curtain drawn between him and his scribe while he was translating. He would place the director in his hat, and then place his face in his hat, so as to exclude

he and the Saints were addressed by Deity. If Bushman is correct, he was his own best disciple—he carefully studied those revelations to try to find direction. We commit a mistake when we make these sorts of things seem bland, commonplace, or ordinary. I believe that we should be stunned when we read the language of our scriptures. The fact is that these things were anything but routine or ordinary.

Bushman argues that for the earliest Saints it was exactly the news that the heavens had once again opened that brought people into the Church of Christ and then began to make some of them turn away from Babylon. It was not Joseph's personality that mattered. Of course he was rough, unpolished—Bushman is right about that. Joseph was passionate—he had a temper. He should not be normalized, turned into a model husband or parent or corporate executive, or seen as a model for conducting successful business ventures. His greatness issues from the fact that he was chosen by God and then stuck with his calling come what may—that he endured. Despite one disaster after another, messages from heaven guided both Brother Joseph and the Saints forward through a sea of troubles since nothing ever turned out the way he or they hoped or expected.

We should all desire to know as much as possible about Joseph Smith. I am disheartened when I notice signs of indifference to him. My own passionate interest in Brother Joseph, as I have explained in "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," is grounded in my belief that he was the human vehicle who set out the ways in which I now have access to divine things and a hope for a glorious future. Joseph made available for us the Book of Mormon, the priesthood, the revelations, and hence the understanding that we can live in a community in which the gifts of the Holy Spirit can be experienced and where both justification

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the light, and then [read the words?] as they appeared before him." Cook, *David Whitmer Interviews,* 233–34. On Joseph's use of a curtain while translating, see Royal Skousen, "Translating the Book of Mormon: Evidence from the Original Manuscript," in *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins,* ed. Noel B. Reynolds (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), 63–64. Joseph's wife, in the "Last Testimony of Sister Emma," *Saints' Advocate* 2/4 (October 1879): 51, bore witness that she "frequently wrote day after day, often sitting at the table close by him, he sitting with his face buried in his hat, with the stone in it, and dictating hour after hour with nothing between us."

and sanctification (deification) are part of the plan of happiness. I am, of course, also aware and pleased that a large number of Saints, by encountering only the bare outlines of Brother Joseph's story, have been able to enter a world in which the divine is present. I am also aware that the recovery of the Book of Mormon, even when its explicit teachings were not the primary focus—which seems to have been the case until rather recently—assured the Saints that the heavens are not closed. For the Saints this is wonderful news.

Bushman could not have ignored the literature critical of Joseph Smith and been either honest or credible; he had to take up issues that may surprise some of the Saints. Those who are troubled by discovering in *Rough Stone Rolling* a discussion of issues they are anxious about or that they fear will not be inspirational or edifying must understand that we simply cannot pretend that some things did not happen; we must, instead, cherish what is a truly amazing, complicated, and rich history. By doing this openly, we avoid the charge that we have sanitized our history, that we hide our past, and that there are things that, if known, would pull the church from its foundations.

Whatever mistakes or flaws there might be in *Rough Stone Rolling,* and I believe there are some of these, the fact is that, by telling Joseph Smith's story from within the categories of his own deep faith, Bushman has made a very large contribution to building and defending the kingdom.

I am, of course, sympathetic with those who have, perhaps for the first time, confronted details in the always controversial, rich, and wonderful story of the founding prophet of this dispensation. In "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," I described my own youthful experience when I encountered something in a biography of Joseph Smith that I found challenging. I discovered even as a kid that one can learn by looking into those things that seem troubling and then profit even from strident criticisms of the founding prophet and his story.[35] We should, I believe, not hide from those things that trouble us but, as far as possible, seek additional light by looking further into the textual evidence; we should ponder more deeply when we are startled or

35. See "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," xi–lxv.

think we have found a mistake in some effort by one of the Saints to tell the founding story of our faith.[36]

Addressing Different Audiences

Bushman clearly wanted to speak convincingly to those not within the circle of faith; he wanted to write in such a way that Joseph Smith would be accessible to those who are not Latter-day Saints. He wanted to get those not of his faith to go along with his account of Joseph's life and times. He also wanted to take them both into and beyond the challenging "first steps" and into the larger story. His standing within the history profession made it possible to have *Rough Stone Rolling* published by a distinguished press. Never before has a national publisher sold as many copies of a book by a Latter-day Saint.

Bushman seems to have believed that he had figured out a way of getting non–Latter-day Saints to accept his account of Joseph Smith. He was, it turns out, wrong. He had underestimated the hostility about Mormon things among cultural elites, both Christian and otherwise. Bushman seems to have been both dismayed and shocked by the reception *Rough Stone Rolling* has received among those who are not Latter-day Saints. He had lived among them and hence thought he knew how to speak to those folks. Perhaps his easy way of making friends misled him about how they really see his faith. Be that as it may, he tailored *Rough Stone Rolling* to get them to see Joseph Smith as something other than a scoundrel, but he essentially failed. He now regrets not writing *Rough Stone Rolling* as an advocate rather than by submerging his own deepest convictions in an effort to get non–Latter-day Saints to take Brother Joseph seriously.

How do I know these things? I have followed the blogs in which *Rough Stone Rolling* has been debated and have also read a number of interviews with Bushman concerning his book. I also own a copy of a remarkably candid diary in which he reveals his expectations, desires, passions, and disappointments surrounding the publication of *Rough Stone Rolling.* This diary serves as a kind of postpublication apology

36. See "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," xxv–xxix.

for his biography of Joseph Smith. This unusual "book" is entitled *On the Road with Joseph Smith*.[37] *On the Road* is, I believe, in some important ways, though not nearly as polished, better written than *Rough Stone Rolling.* In his diary, Bushman speaks effectively to those Saints he may have lost with *Rough Stone Rolling.* Why? Bushman the believer stands out; he does not disappear behind long descriptions of events in which it becomes difficult to determine where he really stands on issues. In addition, this diary has many of the same qualities that his essays have. Fortunately most of his LDS essays have recently been assembled in a volume entitled *Believing History*.[38]

Bushman is irenic, shrewd, insightful, and calm. His faith shines through in his essays, though often in unobtrusive, carefully articulated ways. Though he seems to detest the word *apologist* because of its current role in often mindless ideological battles, he is very much an apologist—that is, a defender of the faith and the Saints. I admire Bushman's essays. He is, I believe, at his very best as an essayist. Hence I urge those Saints who may have misgivings about *Rough Stone Rolling* to pay close attention both to the remarkable essays in *Believing History* and to *On the Road* when it is eventually made easily accessible.

This diary is, I believe, Bushman's effort to explain and defend what he tried to do as well as his reaction to what has taken place as he began to sense that he might have failed to accomplish all that he had hoped in his biography of Joseph Smith. He clearly thought or hoped that he could keep Latter-day Saints with him, a phrase he likes, while at the same time dragging along the Gentiles, whom he seems to have believed he could somehow charm into setting aside their hostility to Mormon things. He now has recognized, I believe, that to some

37. Richard Lyman Bushman, *On the Road with Joseph Smith: An Author's Diary* (New York: Mormon Artists Group, 2006). This unbound "book" contains printing on one side of eighty-three pages of very expensive, unbound paper, with its own wooden slip cover (made of cherry wood). One hundred and two copies were printed. Each copy is numbered and signed by Bushman. Kofford Books is in the process of publishing it in a more accessible format. If that were not the case, I would comment on it in detail.

38. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Believing History: Latter-day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004); a paperback version of the book has just been released in 2007.

extent, in his effort to get the Gentiles to go along with him on Joseph Smith, he failed to reach either audience in the way he had expected. His effort to speak in the same dispassionate voice to two radically different audiences simply failed. The non-LDS audience, as reflected in reviews and in various other ways, seems to have seen far too much of Bushman's own faith in *Rough Stone Rolling,* which it turned out that they detest, while at least some of the Saints have wondered whether he was a believer. I believe that he would have done better if he had argued his case more directly in *Rough Stone Rolling*—that is, if he had explained in some detail why he simply must mention things that make some Saints uncomfortable and also why he and other Latter-day Saints can believe what Gentiles insist are ridiculous stories.

The story of the restoration is more challenging and wonderful than we sometimes make it appear. When we dumb it down, we do ourselves a big disservice. It is, among other things, a story that, because its essential prophetic truth claims are true, radically challenges our worldly desires and assumptions. It is not merely sentimental feel-good stuff or something vaguely inspirational. Of course, the basic outlines of Brother Joseph's story are familiar to Latter-day Saints. But many of the details are either not known or not sufficiently well-known. Joseph's story cannot be reduced even to an account of his encountering a messenger from the heavens who once lived somewhere in America. That element, of course, is crucial, but it is not all of the story. By fleshing out Joseph Smith's story—the first and founding story of our faith, Bushman has capped his distinguished career with an important service to the Saints. Whatever the flaws in his book, Bushman helps us to better appreciate our wonderful historical legacy, if we are really interested in doing so.

A Short List of Observations about *Rough Stone Rolling*[39]

1. Are there flaws in the account of Joseph Smith provided by Bushman? Yes. (But I am not inclined to discuss these in public.)

39. These opinions are offered without supporting arguments. My intention in doing this is to make my position on *Rough Stone Rolling* as clear as possible.

2. Did Bushman neglect some primary and secondary literature that would have been useful for him to have consulted? Yes, of course. That was inevitable. (Again, I am not interested in calling attention to this in public.)

3. Do I think that *Rough Stone Rolling* is the final word on Joseph Smith? No.

4. Are there some things about *Rough Stone Rolling* that trouble me? Yes. For one thing, the clumsy way the citations are packed at the back of the book and then coded to the bibliography. This is simply an outrage. Why? It makes locating the sources Bushman cites very difficult. In addition, at times a series of quotations in a paragraph are packed into a single endnote. Then one has to play the game of figuring out which quotation comes from which source. Why not just have footnotes with full citations?

5. Did I learn new things by reading *Rough Stone Rolling*? Yes, of course. I encountered many delightful or troubling bits of information or interpretation. In "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," I tried to explain how I believe one should respond to things that annoy or trouble one when reading the literature on any topic in which one is interested, and especially on Joseph Smith.[40]

6. Are there explanations of issues where Bushman could have avoided mistakes by consulting others? Yes.

7. Will *Rough Stone Rolling* weaken the faith of those Saints who read it? No, only in the case of those who insist on an idealized two-dimensional figure.

8. Did Bushman write in such a way that all the Saints will sense his own deep faith? No.

9. Should Bushman have exposed his own faith more directly in *Rough Stone Rolling*? Yes.

10. Is *Rough Stone Rolling* superior to other past or recent biographies of Joseph Smith? Yes. It is far superior to recent efforts by those who have access to much of the primary source material. One important reason is that Bushman strictly avoids the onerous mistake of what has come to be known as "clairvogelance" when writing about

40. "Knowing Brother Joseph Again," xi–xxix.

the past.[41] Given what it takes to master the relevant literature, to think clearly about complicated and controversial issues, and to write sufficiently well, we are not likely to have a better biography of Joseph Smith for some time.

41. For this insightful label, see Andrew H. Hedges and Dawson W. Hedges, "No Dan, That's Still Not History," *FARMS Review* 17/1 (2005): 211.