

DOUGLAS DAVIES

## Mormon History, Text, Colour, and Rites

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Mormonism's growth from its 1830 inception to its 2005 near twelve million world membership, has not only initiated a debate over whether, perhaps, it is likely to become the next world-religion after Islam,<sup>1</sup> but has, in recent decades, also witnessed the publication of numerous books that help foster an interest in what is already becoming a distinctive field of study. Though none of the four books reviewed here constitutes an introductory overview,<sup>2</sup> each introduces a set of major issues within contemporary Mormon studies and engages, respectively, with faith-related attitudes to historical material, the Book of Mormon, the changing status of black males in the church, and Freemasonry's impact on Mormonism's origin.

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### **Believing History**

Neilson and Woodworth have collected the key papers of Richard Bushman, presented in three parts covering, "Belief," "The Book of Mormon and History," and "Joseph Smith and Culture."<sup>3</sup> Bushman ranks prime amongst contemporary Mormon scholars, most especially historians. His own *Joseph Smith and the Beginnings of Mormonism* remains a foundational evaluation of the movement's prophetic founder.<sup>4</sup> He is, currently, Gouverneur Morris Professor of History Emeritus at Columbia University. The fact that the prophet was born only in 1805, and his church founded and key book published in 1830, in American contexts of hotly contested power pursued not only with arms but through the press, has meant that historical analysis of events and sources has played a huge part in the life of the church. Within this largely lay-led group, devoid of theologically trained clerics, judgements upon events

1. Rodney Stark, "The Rise of a New World Faith," *Review of Religious Research* 26 (1984): 18–27.

2. For which see, Thomas O'Dea, *The Mormons* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957); Jan Shippo, *The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1985); Douglas J. Davies, *Introduction to Mormonism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

3. Richard Lyman Bushman, *Believing History: Latter-Day Saint Essays*, ed. Reid L. Neilson and Jed Woodworth (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

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

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Douglas Davies is Professor in the Study of Religion, Durham University, England.

and their significance, along with the enduring influence of “great” individuals, has produced an ideological community given to “history” of several kinds. Indeed, since history has, in a sense, sometimes served as the medium for Mormon self-reflection, understanding and even “theology,” it has not always been the easiest or safest place for intellectual Mormons educated within “secular” schools. How, then, has Bushman maintained his church participation whilst practising serious history? The editors emphasise in their brief but useful Introduction this issue of faith, ideology and scholarship and we turn to it below. Here it is important to note that these Bushman essays span a thirty-year period, 1969–2001, and furnish one example of religious-scholarly reflexivity, especially in Part One.

The youthful “Faithful History” touches on issues of divine providence, choice of mode of historical analysis, and the “working out of a Mormon heritage in response to the self I encounter in moments of faith.”<sup>5</sup> A driving feature of Bushman’s method relates scholarly clarity to moral insight — “We gain knowledge no faster than we are saved.” This is, itself, controversial. Can it be argued that historians need to be morally good before they can be good historians? Would this only apply to some kinds of “religious” history? Less controversially, his outlook is slightly reminiscent of Max Weber’s concern over kinds of salvation and the relation between ideology and action. Something of Bushman’s motivation begins to emerge in the autobiographical essay, “My Belief” — “Harvard helped redeem me, too, but it eroded my faith in God. I went to church regularly . . .”<sup>6</sup> It tells of the youth without “a testimony of the gospel” coming to a broad acceptance of the church’s message, serving a mission and, with time, filling other church duties. Indeed, that very essay is, essentially, an intellectual version of the ordinary Mormon “testimony” but with distinctive content focused on an evolving awareness of the power of emotion in “a gradual merger of personality and belief.”<sup>7</sup> Photographs of the youthful and mature Richard Bushman tell their own story of continuity and change.<sup>8</sup>

In, “The Social Dimension of Rationality”, Bushman argues the importance of one’s social group within which he, at least, accepts “religion as an absolutely necessary crutch that I need to hobble on through life.”<sup>9</sup> This is an important essay concerning commitment and identity forged through religious and academic communities and merits an extended comment. In his own gloss he says that, “we always make social decisions when we decide on truth.”<sup>10</sup> While, on this point, I most clearly know what he means I also most decidedly disagree with him. I would, of course, agree that social factors affect our thinking but I would want to scrutinise the idea that we make decisions to enhance a social situation. Although Bushman, early disconcerted

5. Bushman, *Believing History*, 17.

6. Bushman, *Believing History*, 21.

7. Bushman, *Believing History*, 25.

8. Bushman, *Believing History*, 21, 28.

9. Bushman, *Believing History*, 38.

10. Bushman, *Believing History*, 37.

by logical positivism, “welcomed post-modern criticism because it undermined my old bugaboo, positivist science”, he did not “completely buy into post-modern thinking . . . being too much a child of the fifties for that.” This ambivalence reflects, I think, his concern to make intellectual decisions that accord with existential needs of life and, for him, these demand a secure moral base within a firm community. “Even hermits image a community of some kind when they decide what is good and true.” While I roundly accept the “social dimensions of rationality” — having long been persuaded by Durkheim’s theory on the origin of the social categories — I do not think that our cultural classifications exhaust the possibilities of human imagination. If they did Bushman could not argue, as he does in some of the essays on Joseph Smith, that the individual can — ultimately — be a creative source. In his essay on “Joseph Smith as Translator,” for example, Bushman rehearses Joseph telling of having “stood alone,” and describes Joseph’s “burden of living an incredible life.”<sup>11</sup> Much the same could be said of Martin Luther. While our knowledge of the psychology of discovery in relation to cultural constraints remains in its infancy it is still worth noting the impact of numerous prophets, religious reformers and scientists in shifting some key worldviews. Here I do not think it contradictory to speak both of the power of traditional cultural classifications and of the capacity for creativity. Any account of society, not least of religious traditions, needs to employ each of these if any realistic appraisal is to be made of innovation and change, and even of re-presentations of tradition. However, for prophets or scientists, as for anyone seriously committed to evaluating and interpreting religious ideas, the dynamic relationship between community and individuality may become seriously problematic, even rising to the point of crisis that prompts a new vision of the way things are. This is of particular import for members of a religious community who engage in any study of that community, most especially when they raise the topic of truth, as Bushman does. Once the issue of truth is raised its advocate should be prepared to be pressed on the point. Bushman does, in fact, ponder some of these issues in a decidedly reflexive fashion. Even so, in this case it seems appropriate to ask Bushman whether it is a community or an individual that comes to a decision about the nature of things? Or, perhaps — to pose the question in a Durkheimian manner — “Is the community such a part of the individual that it takes the decision ‘within him’?” This is what seems to be the case for Bushman who places the issue of truth secondary to the question of how we should live our life. His is a debate over goodness and truth, with the academic community unconcerned over morality while the religious community is committed to it. Bushman makes much play on the demise of the Enlightenment project of individuality establishing objectivity whilst, at the same time, it seems, seeing the individual as the one who must, still, decide to be communitarian. A great deal of his essay takes the form of an exercise in the descriptive disarming of the

11. Bushman, *Believing History*, 245.

opponent. He makes much play of the post-modern and critical theorist account of knowledge and power, of the arenas within which we seek praise and prestige. For me, too much of this remains communal. It may well be that Mormonism, along with traditional Catholicism or ardent Protestantism is so community constructed, albeit in diverse ways, that the ultimate option of an individual decision remains impossible. This is one way of saying that such communities, as they now stand, would make the life of a prophet hard.

In response to this I do wonder whether, perhaps, intellectuals — most especially those committed to religious groups — ought not to ponder more the philosophical significance of religion's pre-occupation with sacrifice to ask how "sacrifice" might relate to truth and, inevitably to morality. Might "sacrifice" — a prime "religious" process — not also extend to the intellectual venture at large? What, for example, might sacrificial thinking be? What would I sacrifice for the truth? Should I allow a post-modern relativism, a succouring community sensation or a prized academic acceptance to render the very question redundant? I consider I should not. All these are, of course, profound issues affecting the basic question of methodology and hermeneutics within the human sciences.<sup>12</sup> The benefit of Bushman's essay, typified by an honesty that, in itself, reveals a kind of "communitarian truth," is that it fosters discussion. A great deal of research and reflective honesty still lies ahead within the study of religious ideas if the dynamics of personal identity are to be understood in relation to our personal scholarly endeavour in relation to the diverse religious and academic communities to which we belong.

Let me, then, commend this book as a fine entry into the numerous debates flourishing within Mormon Studies. Its Part Two, on "The Book of Mormon," includes valuable material on the "American Revolution," "Early Mormon History," "Critics of the Book," and its more contemporary "Recovery." Part Three focuses on Joseph Smith in relation to scepticism, to visionary worlds, to whether Smith was a "gentleman," and to his self-image as a translator. The essay on the idea of space and Mormon town planning will interest many. Together these essays reflect Bushman's much wider historical work and show how he approaches Mormon phenomena, in part, from a perspective of historical cultural analysis. Either complementing or conflicting with that cultural eye, however, is the heart of faith and an underlying sense that a divine revelation to Joseph Smith really did take place for, as we have seen, Bushman is keen to be identified as a committed and not merely a cultural Latter-day Saint.

### **Book of Mormon**

A key issue in any historical consideration of Mormonism is the Book of Mormon itself. While anyone engaging in serious Mormon studies needs to read the Book of Mormon this is no easy task, especially for those not brought up as Mormons and who are, necessarily, unfamiliar with a host of names and events that echo the Bible text and yet diverge markedly from it.

12. Cf. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), 21.

Its King James Version style of English often lacks the Authorized Version's literary flow and hinders easy reading. Without the motivating commitment of the believer the merely inquisitive person is likely to give up on the task. To make the book more accessible and, perhaps, attractive, Grant Hardy, a Church member and also an academic historian, has produced this version of the Book of Mormon, primarily, for non-Mormon readers.<sup>13</sup> It is not an official edition of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and unlike that edition, does not contain an apparatus involving cross-references to other key texts such as the *Doctrine and Covenants*. Here I can neither outline the theological themes or epic narratives that make up the Book of Mormon nor can I rehearse the diverse critiques and defences made of it. Many of those are sketched in Bushman's *Believing History*.<sup>14</sup> Many other textual, theological, and cultural topics have been carefully considered, for example, in Robert J. Matthews's *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible*, Philip L. Barlow's *Mormons and the Bible*, and Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion*.<sup>15</sup> Hardy's edition does contain, however, a basic bibliography of other material, both supportive and critical. It omits, however, Lynn Matthews Anderson's very useful version written for her own children's easier access.<sup>16</sup>

In his brief "Introduction" Hardy sketches the various editions through which the Book of Mormon has passed from its original 1830 edition, through the addition of chapter and verse in 1879, to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' official edition of 1920. It is the 1920 edition that Hardy has taken and, essentially, reworked by seeking to improve elements of punctuation and, especially, of text layout. In particular he has introduced a series of headings and sub-headings to give some direction to the flow of the plot. A set of some eight appendices include material covering the various "Testimonies" to the authenticity of the Book of Mormon that usually appear at the beginning of Church editions, the chronology of translation, issues of the "golden plates" as well as charts and maps reckoning to cover the various wanderings and migrations of Book of Mormon groups from the ancient near-east to America.

### **Black and Mormon**

If the Book of Mormon stands as one prime source of Mormon reflective identity the institution of the priesthood provides its crucial practical complement. From early days Mormons organised the church through the lower or Aaronic and higher or Melchizedek Priesthoods. All "worthy" males went through

13. *The Book of Mormon: A Reader's Edition*, ed. Grant Hardy (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

14. Bushman, *Believing History*, ch. 5–9, 15, 16.

15. Robert J. Matthews, *Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 1985); Philip L. Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture that Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000).

16. Lynn Matthews Anderson, *Easy-to Read Book of Mormon* (Apple Valley, MN: Estes Book Company, 1995).

this system. All, that is, except males of Negro background. In June 1978, however, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) made an Official Declaration that all worthy males could be ordained to the priesthood “without regard for race or color [*sic*].” The office had been closed to such men since 1852. The prophet, Spencer W. Kimball, was the medium of this message. Although Bringhurst and Smith’s edited volume sets out to document the contemporary situation of black church members in the USA its eight chapters also go some considerable way in portraying how LDS have viewed Negro people from the 1830s to the present.<sup>17</sup> Theoretically, the book is useful for its repeated concern with the relationship between official doctrine and popular folklore, a particularly delicate issue in a church with an authoritarian yet non-theologically trained senior and junior leadership.

Newell Bringhurst’s opening chapter, in describing differing theories of early Mormon attitudes to slavery and to the closure of the priesthood to black men, offers an appropriate introduction to much academic literature on LDS topics in which hotly disputed interpretation of detailed historical analysis and emergent religious-theological ideas are influenced by a variety of personal views of contemporary and past forms of church orthodoxy. His main focus is on the “Missouri Thesis” which argued that the ban on black ordination resulted from the “social stress” of anti-Mormon antagonism in the slave-state of Missouri in the 1830s. He documents other theorists such as Stephen L. Taggart who believed that Brigham Young in the late 1840s and not Joseph Smith in the mid-1830s introduced the idea, while Ronald L. Esplin linked the 1847 ban with the introduction of special temple rites in 1842–43, a year before the prophet’s death in 1844. Important attention is paid to theories — especially of Armand Mauss — concerning British Israelism and the idea that Joseph Smith was descended from the ancient Jewish lineage of Ephraim. The chapter includes interesting asides on special consideration for personal servants of early Mormons as well as the Negro Elijah Abel, his son and grandson, all of whom were ordained in some sense prior to the 1978 lifting of the priesthood ban. Alma Allred’s chapter ponders differences between doctrine, policies, and practices within the church and is of interest for its reference to aspects of Mormon folk-lore that pass for doctrine at the local level. Ronald G. Coleman and Darius A. Gray recount the fortitude and faithfulness of a black woman Jane Elizabeth James and a black man Len Hope Sr. who were devoted Saints prior to the 1978 revelation and despite hostility within local congregations. Jessie L. Embry’s characteristically scholarly article tells of her earlier work on the LDS African American Oral History Project that ran from 1984 to 1988, as well as indicating her own personal experience as a relatively ordinary LDS devoid of much contact with black people, but largely accepting the Mormon stereotype of black people having been “less valiant” in the pre-existent world from which all of us come to this earth. She recounts two stories of black families with experience in the

17. *Black and Mormon*, ed. Newell G. Bringhurst and Darron T. Smith (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2004).

church before and after the 1978 ban-removal, telling of their conversion, resilience, and “tolerance for ambiguity,” under varied levels of antagonism. She emphasises the immeasurable element of faith and spiritual satisfaction that kept them in the church over many difficult years.

Armand Mauss’s important chapter, “Casting Off the ‘Curse of Cain’: The Extent and Limits of Progress since 1978,” is closely linked to his important book *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage*.<sup>18</sup> Mauss, a Mormon and distinguished sociologist has also written the influential text *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation*.<sup>19</sup> In this essay he pinpoints the Church’s “burden of its own racist heritage,” a burden that endures in much folk-lore, in popular religious attitudes that pervade parts of the Church, especially in the USA, and in the “benign neglect” showed by leaders to these misleading motifs. Mauss, significantly, speaks of *doctrinal folklore*, an interesting way of transcending any simple divide between official and unofficial religion. He also explores key issues of Mormon attitudes to civil rights, to the negotiation of identity amongst black and white Mormons, and to forms of revelation in relation to time. This is a key chapter in the book.

Cardell K. Jacobson brings some further analysis to sociological factors of black church members and is of interest for those concerned with issues associated with denominational switching and the perceived advantages of joining a new group, especially those of community identity and perceived increased social status and improved life-style. Ken Driggs’s account of an LDS African American group in Atlanta includes a worthwhile description of the Genesis Group, established by church authority in 1971 to support black members during the years before the lifting of the priesthood ban. The final chapter, Darron Smith’s, “Unpacking Whiteness in Zion” is a heartfelt essay by a black church member seeking to use “whiteness theory” to draw church members’ and leaders’ attention to “how whiteness is ‘normalized’ and secured in American society.” As an even stronger assertion of the folklore theme present in several other chapters he speaks of the “racist folklore” he has observed in the church and which he thinks most members do not even recognise to be such. These themes are instructive for anyone pondering the development of religious ideas within a relatively young church whose interplay of revelation with pre-existing Christian belief, popular opinion, and the catalyst and constraint of events is relatively open to observation. Overall this is a good book. Its mix of formal and oral historical concerns alongside sociological analyses and personal comment would make it a sound introduction to material on Mormonism and its African-American membership. The Index is adequate though it would have benefited from a final Bibliography rather than restrict Notes to the end of each chapter.

18. Armand Mauss, *All Abraham’s Children: Changing Mormon Conceptions of Race and Lineage* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2003).

19. Armand Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1994).

### Equal Rites

Within historical debates over Mormon origins the issue of Freemasonry holds a strategic position. This is because certain Mormon ideas and temple ceremonies have become essential to ultimate salvation and, it is argued, that these were derived from Masonic Temple or Lodge rites. Such links have been extensively pursued, for example, in David J. Buerger's *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship*, which would serve as a good introduction to the theme.<sup>20</sup> More influential and more deeply historically rooted, perhaps, is John L. Brooke's *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844*, which argued the significance of Hermetic world-views as they moved from Europe to the USA and touched imaginative aspects of popular culture.<sup>21</sup>

Clyde Forsberg's *Equal Rites*, by contrast with Buerger's study, is more appropriate for those already knowledgeable about Mormonism and able to judge between the volume's genuinely interesting ideas and its wider speculation, for it covers much ground but with variable certainty.<sup>22</sup> Forsberg's primary idea over Freemasonry's influence on early Mormonism is that Joseph Smith sought to establish a form of Christian Masonry in which the secret ritual life of men became available to women in a movement transcending religious and political rivalries, all within a single political order. Racial divides, too, would be transcended through a scheme of intergroup polygamy, primarily between white men and women of various colours: in that connection he sees Negro males being disadvantaged just as they were, in being banned from the Mormon priesthood.

Though often speculative, the book is useful in setting the Masonry of Joseph Smith into the wider role of Masonry in the birth and political growth of the USA. It describes American social development as a competition between Masonry and Evangelicalism with the latter winning out: Mormonism becomes a combined development of the two. The Book of Mormon is deemed a Masonically influenced text whose "single motif" is "the quest for the long-lost book of all the Law."<sup>23</sup> One of Forsberg's key theses is that the Book of Mormon could have served as a kind of imaginative and conceptual engagement with ideas that only later, with the advent of Mormon temples, could be experienced through practical ritual. In other words, Joseph Smith, as the direct author of the Book of Mormon, used it as a kind of thought-map of a ritual way of life that would only be realised in and through the practical ceremony (especially of the temples) that emerged some years after the Book of Mormon was published.

This raises a theoretically interesting point for ritual studies that deserves proper discussion but, due to his jaunty style, it is more likely to be ignored

20. David J. Buerger, *The Mysteries of Godliness: A History of Mormon Temple Worship* (Salt Lake City: Signature Books, 1994).

21. John L. Brooke, *The Refiner's Fire: The Making of Mormon Cosmology, 1644–1844* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

22. Clyde R. Forsberg, Jr., *Equal Rites: The Book of Mormon, Masonry, Gender, and American Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

23. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 121.



or dismissed out of hand. To emphasise his point here: within the history of religion it is worth exploring diverse modes of participation in religious ideas, especially in association with the complementary topics of embodiment at one end of a “knowledge” continuum and philosophical enquiry at the other. In this case he might yet explore, for example, different forms of use and neglect of the Book of Mormon,<sup>24</sup> including the contemporary resurgence of interest in it as described in Bushman’s collected essays, chapter eight.

Another of his theses is that, initially, Mormonism was a kind of rite of passage through which boys became men. His reading of American religion in the early nineteenth century takes it as possessing a strong feminine component from which some wished to flee. In this, too, he sees Mormonism and Masonry sharing a social property but with Mormonism successfully wedding the male-bonding desire with a religious drive. Combined with this is another gender-related current, one in which he sees Mormonism offering a degree of freedom for women over and above that of the feminine evangelicalism of Joseph’s day. For, in the emergent Mormon temple rite of endowment women stood alongside men in ceremonies that would unite them for all eternity and set them upon the path of godhood. These possibilities of advancing male maturation and female emancipation are hallmarks of the strong gender themes underlying Forsberg’s book. For him, the Mormon Temple is the Masonic Lodge thrown open to women whilst, at the same time, avoiding the patriarchy of Evangelical Protestantism.

Behind the Book of Mormon and Mormon temples Forsberg sets Joseph Smith. With poor eyes and low level of literacy he is taken to be “aural-oral savant,” at home in a male culture of secrets and mysteries transmitted from mouth to ear: one whose life was directed by “events” and who, probably, possessed a Masonic symbolic document “translated” to become the Book of Mormon. This particular suggestion might, possibly, go some way to answer the fundamental question in Bushman’s chapter eight on “Joseph Smith as Translator,” namely what inspired Joseph even to think of himself as a translator? Smith was, more certainly and importantly, influenced by the murder of one William Morgan, reckoned to be at the hands of fellow Masons when about to disclose Masonic secrets. This left Smith “a bemused Masonic sophomore.”<sup>25</sup> But, had Smith been a Mason prior to the record of his 1842 admission or had Smith’s supposed limp, the result of a boyhood operation, prevented his joining the society of physically perfect men? This is an important question since it would largely determine whether he possessed the kind of knowledge to inform his production of the Book of Mormon as the cryptic ritual text Forsberg believes it to be.

Other parts of Forsberg’s study also introduce topics more as aspects of lateral thinking or association of ideas than by necessary alliance of evidence. Chapter ten on “Heaven and Hell,” for example, introduces Swedenborgianism as a “more likely theological frame for the Book of Mormon discussion of the

24. Pace Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 135.

25. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 32.

afterlife . . . than does orthodox Protestant theology.”<sup>26</sup> This is far from proven yet Forsberg uses it as a kind of discursive sign-post in a brief detour into some Patristic and Reformation theology. While selective comparison can often be useful to clarify nuances of theological developments it can also be redundant, especially if more obvious themes are avoided. One such resource is the biblical material of 1 Corinthians 15, a text of importance for Joseph Smith, especially verses 40 and 41 with their references to forms of earthly and heavenly glory, ideas that can be invested with Masonic significance only through anachronism. It might be expected that I would draw attention to this aspect of the book given my own opinion that a major factor in early Mormonism’s development — and in its subsequent organisation as a death-transcending organisation employing extensive genealogical and historical research alongside baptism and other vicarious rites for the dead and for the living — was Joseph Smith’s desire to conquer death, not least in response to his own deep grief at the death of his brother, Alvin.<sup>27</sup>

Stylistically, however, the book frequently lets itself down through sound-bite-like expressions. Whilst normally tending to ignore such matters I am compelled to comment on the many cavalier, if not swashbuckling, elements trampling through this text, precisely because they often spoil many points of substance. A few examples must suffice. When introducing a key theme of his book, *The Masonic Knights Templar*, they are described as “new kids on the (Masonic) block.”<sup>28</sup> Then, after saying that, “The Book of Mormon has not improved with age . . . As books go, it is still viewed as something of an ugly-duckling of American religious prose,” he follows it up in a description of Mormonism as “the goose that laid the golden egg,” being, “conservative in lifestyle, Republican in politics, and evangelical in religion.”<sup>29</sup> Though “evangelical” here, I think, should read “evangelistic,” given the way Mormonism came to diverge so dramatically from Protestant Evangelicalism in the USA. Similarly, while describing the Book of Mormon as “a fine specimen of Masonic fiction,” itself a key hypothesis worthy of analysis, he adds that it is — wrongly in my opinion — “obsessed with mystery and beating around the (burning) bush.”<sup>30</sup> Sometimes it is simpler, and more appropriate, to take an obvious explanation for material at hand rather than import more complex and less likely possibilities. So, for example, when accounting for the departure of Christ from the Nephites in the Book of Mormon it is at least as worth noting that the text largely repeats parts of Saint John’s Gospel as invoke the initiation rites of the Knights Templar.<sup>31</sup> Certainly, Forsberg knows Saint John’s Gospel for, as my final example of his weaker style shows, he refers to its eschatological concerns thus: “A truant Christ returns bodily in

26. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 159.

27. Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2000).

28. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 13.

29. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 26.

30. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 80.

31. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 131.

the Eucharist in the nick of time.”<sup>32</sup> Despite these criticisms, Forsberg’s book repays reading.

Overall, these four volumes offer different kinds of material for the study of Mormonism. Hardy’s *Book of Mormon* is a useful way into that LDS-sacred text. Bushman’s essays are not only seminal within Mormon studies but could well interest historians curious over the dynamic tensions between scholarship and personal religious commitment. Bringhurst and Smith furnish a kind of primary resource on issues of race as well as providing some apt analysis. They exemplify a case in which historical issues continue as contemporary influences within the ongoing community of Saints. Forsberg, as I have said, is a mixed contribution, as much about Masonry as Mormonism and expressing more of a terrier than reformer spirit in what still reflects the doctoral thesis, out of which it grew. Doubtless he will produce further valuable material in the future as this field of Mormon studies expands and matures.

32. Forsberg, *Equal Rites*, 186.

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