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New *FARMS Review* Considers Status of LDS Scholarship

The latest issue of the *FARMS Review* (vol. 19, no. 1) is now available, and within its pages readers will discover a plethora of subjects addressed, including external views of Latter-day Saint scholarship, the historical validity of central LDS truth claims, and much more.

FARMS Review editor Daniel C. Peterson opens the issue by addressing whether the larger academic community will ever think LDS scholarship legitimate, and he offers general reactions to Richard L. Bushman's *Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling* as a test case for current sentiments. Peterson observes that many non-Latter-day Saints are skeptical of Bushman's work because of his faithful viewpoint. Yet as Peterson astutely observes, "It is not at all obvious that believing Muslims, Christians, Jews, and others are obliged to pretend to be atheists in order to gain admission to the historical club" (p. xxx). He further argues that Bushman's belief in and respect for the Prophet should not disqualify him to write about Joseph Smith as a historical figure. However, the reviews of and general reactions to *Rough Stone Rolling* prove that a fair trial will not always be given: "We see the nakedly ideological presumption that believers, no matter how well qualified, no matter how careful and rigorous, cannot, as believers, write 'real' history" (p. xxxviii). Despite Bushman's qualifications and the book's merits, Bushman's and similar works will not always be taken seriously by outside scholars because of their faithful approaches.

Louis Midgley likewise focuses on Bushman's *Rough Stone Rolling* in his review of that book, considering the reactions to it from within the LDS community as well as without and, again, speculating what greater significance these reactions hold for LDS scholarship. Midgley analyzes the book's strengths and weaknesses, particularly in regard to its approach to Joseph Smith from a faithful perspective. While Midgley believes that Bushman could have made his faith in Joseph Smith more transparent throughout the book, he concludes that overall the book is an exceptional work and important to the larger progress of Mormon scholarship.

In a similar strain, M. Gerald Bradford addresses academia's growing interest in Mormon

studies, particularly in studies ranging from history and literature to religious and cultural studies. This increased attention is evident through more scholarly publications and even LDS-related classes offered at a few universities. Bradford concludes that "while a solid foundation of scholarship has been laid in many areas, other crucially important aspects of the faith remain to be studied" (p. 162).

In what Peterson in his introduction titles a "wonderful model of civil, respectful, and informed discussion between evangelicals and Latter-day Saints" (p. lii), doctoral student David E. Bokovoy and evangelical scholar Michael S. Heiser grapple with and exchange ideas about the LDS understanding of Psalm 82 and the divine council. Although Bokovoy and Heiser disagree on several key points, Heiser concludes that he is "glad to see more scholars are taking an interest in this crucial topic. The interaction on Israel's divine council needs to continue" (p. 323).

Also within this number of the *Review*, Peterson, James B. Allen, and John L. Sorenson pay tribute to LDS historian Davis Bitton, who passed away on April 13. In addition, Brant Gardner evaluates David G. Calderwood's *Voices from the Dust: New Insights into Ancient America*, while Richard N. Williams takes a critical look at Scott C. Dunn's proposal that the Book of Mormon was a product of "automatic writing." William J. Hamblin, in two related articles, provides historical examples of scripts that could be considered "reformed Egyptian" and sacred writing on metal plates in pre-Christian cultures of the central and eastern Mediterranean. Alyson Skabelund Von Feldt reviews William G. Dever's *Did God Have a Wife?* and examines his conclusions in parallel with LDS theology. Terryl L. Givens examines the role Mormonism plays and will play in relation to mainstream Christianity, and James Faulconer examines how theology is viewed in Latter-day Saint faith. Jacob Rawlins and Alison V. P. Coutts, in separate articles, review several books on the Christian apostasy, and Stephen D. Ricks reviews a unique perspective on the book of Daniel. To wrap up this number, John Gee reviews a study of facsimiles in the book of Abraham, and Ralph Hancock observes the decline of the secular university in his review.

To view the *FARMS Review* online or to purchase a copy, please visit the Maxwell Institute Web site (maxwellinstitute.byu.edu). 