

Robert J. Matthews and the RLDS Church's Inspired Version of the Bible

Thomas E. Sherry

Robert J. Matthews was the single most prolific source of scholarly publications on the Joseph Smith Translation (JST) of the Bible since his 1975 groundbreaking book, *A Plainer Translation*.¹ Of him, Elder Bruce R. McConkie said: “Brother Matthews is the world authority on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible [and his] . . . spiritual insight is of surpassing import.”² Matthews’s interest in the JST began at age eighteen, and

1. Robert J. Matthews, *“A Plainer Translation”: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible, A History and Commentary* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 1975). Matthews’s work on the JST is voluminous; his work included over fifty-five major articles and books—many more than any other single author. He died on August 30, 2009. Notwithstanding his significant and critical contributions, he wrote: “Throughout the forty years I have studied the Joseph Smith Translation, I have not been in a hurry, nor have I felt that I had a message for the Church. It has been a personal interest, and I have not felt a call to set anybody right.” Robert J. Matthews, “The Joseph Smith Translation and the Doctrine and Covenants: Historical and Doctrinal Companions,” in Robert L. Millet and Larry E. Dahl, eds., *The Capstone of Our Religion* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1989), 63. Among scholars in the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, former Church Historian Richard P. Howard has also written extensively and published the foremost RLDS work, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1st ed. 1969; 2nd ed. 1995).

2. Bruce R. McConkie, “This Generation Shall Have My Word through You,” *The Seventh Annual Sidney B. Sperry Symposium: The Doctrine and Covenants; January 27, 1979* (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University, 1979), 17. The introductory paragraph containing this quote also stated that Robert J. Matthews was “working with great insight, with incisive scholarship, and with superior spiritual ability on some scriptural projects that in the process of time will provide material for the Church of incalculable worth. . . . [Matthews] must have been trained and

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The August 2009 passing of Robert J. Matthews marked the loss of a careful and conscientious scholar, a devoted disciple, and a dear friend and mentor to so many. He was the most prolific author on JST-related topics and truly the “dean” of JST studies. I was privileged to have him and Robert Millet on the committee for my 1988 dissertation, which dealt with the history of how the JST had been treated in publications from 1847 to 1987.



Since then, I have continued to study inspired translation issues. On a research trip to the Community of Christ archives in 2004, Ronald E. Romig shared with me a file of correspondence related to the *Inspired Version* from 1957 to 1975. The letters to and from RLDS Church leaders had numerous references to Matthews and his requests to work with the original manuscripts. These letters painted a picture that had never before been seen and that helps piece together the intriguing story of how both Matthews and the LDS Church again obtained access to these critical documents and the inspired biblical revision work of Joseph Smith. This article tells that story.

though he published on many subjects, the JST was a consuming scholarly focus. Larry E. Dahl and Robert L. Millet have written:

It was in the summer of 1944 that Brother Matthews listened to a radio address given by Elder Joseph Fielding Smith, in which the Apostle quoted a passage of scripture from the King James Version (John 1:18), noted that the translation was incorrect, and then cited the same passage from the Joseph Smith Translation. At that point in his young life . . . Brother Matthews had never heard of the Joseph Smith Translation.

qualified in the pre-existence, to do the things that [he is] now doing; and out of it will come some blessings to the Church, where Biblical and scriptural scholarship is concerned that none of us yet fully envision.” McConkie was referring to the work of Matthews and others on the pending publication of the new LDS edition of the Bible, which included references to Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible.

And yet there came a fascination—much more than a simple curiosity—with this work of the Prophet Joseph, a fascination which over the years ripened into a thorough, scholarly study of the translation.³

Matthews's master's thesis and doctoral dissertation on the subject subsequently laid the groundwork for over fifty publications on the history, making, and doctrine of the JST and its place in the history of the Restoration.⁴

In the course of his research, Matthews wrote to administrators, mostly those in the Church Historian's office of the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saint (RLDS, now Community of Christ). Over a period of fifteen years, he requested help with various research issues relative to the JST and asked to work firsthand with the original manuscripts. His requests for textual clarifications were often accommodated, but permission to work with the documents was repeatedly denied.

Years later, when Matthews was finally allowed to see the original manuscripts, his work on verifying the content of Joseph Smith's Bible revision resolved much "nagging uncertainty" surrounding the text for Latter-day Saints.⁵ Historically, his work came at a time when the Scriptures Publication Committee for The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (LDS) was preparing the content of their 1979 edition of the Bible. His appraisal on the reliability of the RLDS-published versions opened the way for the committee to seek access to the translation and subsequently to include hundreds of footnote citations from it. Accompanying that inclusion was a broad and persistent educational effort to increase awareness and appreciation of the JST through LDS periodicals and educational materials.⁶ These

3. Robert J. Matthews, *A Bible! A Bible!* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1990), vii. More of Matthews's contributions and personal recollections on the saga of his JST interests are chronicled in Robert L. Millet, "Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A Historical Overview" in *The Joseph Smith Translation*, 38–41; Matthews's *A Bible! A Bible!*; Ray L. Huntington and Brian M. Hauglid, "Robert J. Matthews and His Work with the Joseph Smith Translation," *The Religious Educator* 5, no. 2 (2004): 23–47; and Alexander L. Baugh, "Teacher, Scholar, Administrator: A Conversation with Robert J. Matthews," *The Religious Educator* 5, no. 3 (2004): 117–36.

4. Robert J. Matthews, "A Study of the Doctrinal Significance of Certain Textual Changes Made by the Prophet Joseph Smith in the Four Gospels of the Inspired Version of the New Testament" (master's thesis, Brigham Young University, 1960). Robert J. Matthews, "A study of the text of the Inspired Revision of the Bible" (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1968).

5. A term used by McConkie in "The Doctrinal Restoration," 14.

6. From the 1975 publication of Matthews's first book, *A Plainer Translation*, to 2006, there had been over fifty Church-sponsored publications aimed at educating Latter-day Saints on the content, nature, and inspiration of the JST. In his major address to LDS Church educators at the 1984 symposium on the JST, Elder Bruce R.

efforts were augmented and stimulated by two important JST symposia, in 1984 and 1995, inspired by Matthews and hosted at Brigham Young University.⁷ All these developments led to the general use and acceptance of the JST among LDS Church members, educators, and ecclesiastical leaders, thus reversing a century-old practice of omission.

When Matthews started his research on the New Translation, he did not realize he was entering a complex scene of cultural and religious history that had led the LDS Church to eschew the printed version of the Prophet's revision for more than a century and the RLDS to hail it as a keystone in their claim as the "true" church of the Restoration. By 1979, these positions had reversed, and no one played a more significant role in that historic reversal than Matthews.⁸ This documentary history, which draws on letters in the Community of Christ archives and from Matthews's personal files, chronicles the personal correspondence and issues involved in Matthews's finally gaining permission in 1968 to study the original *Inspired Version* manuscripts after fifteen years of repeated refusals. This history also helps us understand the developing attitudes of the RLDS Church toward Joseph Smith and his Bible revision, and it reveals the emerging interest in his revelatory translation among Latter-day Saints.

Joseph Smith's New Translation

In response to divine directive, Joseph Smith had undertaken an inspired revision of the King James Version of the Bible shortly after the Book of Mormon was published. The Prophet and his contemporaries referred to the work as the "New Translation," and the endeavor occupied much of his time from 1830 to 1833. Periodically thereafter, until his death in 1844, the Prophet sought unsuccessfully to prepare the work for publication.⁹ His translation included thousands of changes and additions

McConkie charged them: "When the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible . . . came forth, then teachers were to use it. . . . This, then, is the command to teach the changes and additions now found in the so-called Inspired Version. . . . This, then, is what is expected of us as teachers." McConkie, "The Doctrinal Restoration," 3.

7. Publications from these symposia are Nyman and Millet, eds., *The Joseph Smith Translation*; and Robert L. Millet and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Plain and Precious Truths Restored: The Doctrinal and Historical Significance of the Joseph Smith Translation* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995).

8. For the larger story on this change and where Matthews fits in, see Thomas E. Sherry, "Appendix: Changing Attitudes Toward Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible," in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored*, 187–226.

9. See Robert J. Matthews, "Joseph Smith's Efforts to Publish His Bible 'Translation,'" *Ensign* 13 (January 1983): 57–64.

to verses in the Old and New Testaments and largely laid the foundation for much of the doctrinal contributions of the restored gospel.

Joseph Smith's wife Emma retained the unpublished manuscripts when leaders of the LDS Church left Nauvoo in 1846, and "none of the participants in the translation process were with the Church when the Saints moved west."¹⁰ In 1866, she transferred custodial care of the manuscripts to her son Joseph Smith III, then president of the RLDS Church, which had been organized six years earlier.¹¹ The translation was originally published by the RLDS Church in 1867 with the title *Holy Scriptures*. In 1936, the subtitle *Inspired Version* (IV) was added, and this eventually became the common name used by RLDS members; more recently the term Joseph Smith's Bible Revision (JSBR) has also been employed in RLDS academic circles.

Because LDS Church members lost access to the Prophet's "crowning achievement," along with the rich history related to the translation, they had many misconceptions about the JST.¹² However, the misunderstanding surrounding the work changed in the latter part of the twentieth century, and Matthews was the central figure in enabling this change.

Among the historical sources contributing to our understanding of how Matthews finally gained access to the New Translation manuscripts is a letter file dedicated to correspondence relative to the *Inspired Version*. The file contains sixty-nine letters to and from RLDS First Presidency members and other Church administrators between 1957 and 1975. (See appendix B for a list of RLDS administrators mentioned in this article.) Several letters treat various aspects of Matthews's requests as well as other issues of challenge and change among administrators that affected their responses.

Little did Matthews know that his many requests to work firsthand with the original manuscripts came during an increasingly complicated period in RLDS history that included issues relative to the publication, assessment,

10. Scott H. Faulring, Kent P. Jackson, and Robert J. Matthews, eds., *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible: Original Manuscripts* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2004), 7. For more on the odyssey of the JST from historic nonuse by the LDS Church to official inclusion in the 1979 LDS edition of the Bible, see Robert L. Millet, "Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible: A Historical Overview," in *The Joseph Smith Translation*, 35–42.

11. In 2001, the RLDS Church changed its name to Community of Christ.

12. McConkie taught that "as a crowning achievement [Joseph Smith] would begin the perfection of the Bible. . . . The Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible is holy scripture. In one sense of the word, it is the crowning part of the doctrinal restoration." McConkie, "The Doctrinal Restoration," 10, 21. The LDS Church did retain for use those portions of the JST that were previously published by Joseph Smith in Church periodicals and later became part of the Pearl of Great Price (the Book of Moses and Matthew 24).

and use of the *Inspired Version*. The evolving climate among administrators, church members, academics, and historians surrounding *Inspired Version* issues initially precipitated the early denials of Matthews's requests.

It also is impossible to separate changing views on the *Inspired Version* from the greater fabric of historic doctrinal change that occurred in the RLDS Church during the 1960s and 1970s, and which continues into the twenty-first century. Of this evolution, Dave Nii, an RLDS historian, has written:

For a movement that spoke highly of education, knowledge, and truth, the confrontation with data that did not support the RLDS "orthodoxy" of historical theology presented significant moments of self-reflection and self-examination. . . . The church leadership appeared to make a discernable move from a perspective of the "one true church" toward a perspective of "a church seeking truth."¹³

Inquiries into the New Translation Manuscripts

In late February 1959, the RLDS First Presidency received an inquiry from Glen H. Johnson (of the Utah RLDS Church) in which he asked whether "the Utah [LDS] Church has ever approached the Reorganized

13. Dave Nii, "Orthodoxy in RLDS Thought: The Questionable Quest for Legitimacy and Reasonableness," in *Restoration Studies VIII*, ed. Maurice L. Draper (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 2000), 137. More on the continuing evolution in RLDS thought can be found in the recent 1993–2005 colloquy series cosponsored by the RLDS/Community of Christ First Presidency and Graceland College: Richard A. Brown, ed., *Theology*, 13 vols. (Independence, Missouri: Graceland Press, 1993–2005). Thanks to Alma Blair and William Russell for the following reference guide on the earlier evolution of RLDS beliefs, theology, and practices: Clifford A. Cole, *Faith for New Frontiers* (Independence, Missouri: Herald House, 1956). See William D. Russell, *Treasures in Earthen Vessels: An Introduction to the New Testament Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter Day Saints*, 1966); Garland E. Tickemyer, *The Good News: An Outline Story of the Rise, Fall, Attempts at Reformation, and Final Restoration of the Church of Jesus Christ* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, n.d.); Wayne Ham, "Problems in Interpreting the Book of Mormon as History," in *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* 1, no. 1 (September 1970): 15–22; Alan O. Tyree, ed., *Exploring the Faith: A Series of Studies in Faith of the Church Prepared by a Committee on Basic Beliefs* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1987); Richard P. Howard, "Latter Day Saint Scriptures and the Doctrine of Propositional Revelation," in *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought, and Action* 1, no. 4 (June 1971): 209–25; Richard P. Howard, *Restoration Scriptures: A Study of Their Textual Development* (Independence, Missouri: Herald Publishing House, 1969, 2d ed. 1995).

This article quotes RLDS administrative letters regarding the *Inspired Version* of the Bible. Ronald E. Romig, Church Archivist for the Community of Christ, granted access to the letters and reviewed this article prior to publication: “Tom, I carefully reread your revised manuscript and wholeheartedly support its publication. It will make an important addition to our understanding of the evolution of the use and popularity of the content, especially in the LDS movement.” Formal approval from Community of Christ leaders to publish the article also came through Romig: “Tell BYU press representatives that you have already received all the necessary permissions and that the Community of Christ is anxious for you to proceed to publication.”

Church asking for the right to publish the Inspired Version of the Scriptures.”¹⁴ The First Presidency passed the inquiry to Kenneth Graham of Herald House, the official publishing arm of the RLDS Church. He responded to Johnson that no record existed of such a request. Graham observed that sales in Utah averaged between two and three hundred copies a year, but it seemed “rather clear that there is no official approval of the book” by the LDS Church. Graham recalled that Herald House had tried to advertise the *Inspired Version* in LDS publications but was refused space. He also noted the fact that “the text of the Inspired Version is now public domain and should the Utah people decide to come out with an edition of their own, they could do so without copyright infringement.”¹⁵

This exchange between Johnson and Graham introduced to the letter file the first reflection of long-standing angst between the LDS Church and RLDS interests over the New Translation. Regardless of Matthews’s academic interests or qualifications, his requests and the responses to them were significantly influenced by the unsettled historical relationship between the two churches during this era.

14. Glen H. Johnson to the First Presidency, February 25, 1959, Community of Christ Library-Archives. Hereafter, all citations to letters refer to the letter file associated with the New Translation manuscripts in this repository unless otherwise noted.

15. Glen H. Johnson to Kenneth Graham, March 20, 1959.

In May 1960, Matthews first wrote to RLDS historian Charles A. Davies, inquiring about changes in various printings of the *Inspired Version* and seeking permission to “quote extensively from the Inspired Version [in classes, correspondence, etc.], and would appreciate very much knowing that you had given complete permission. Of course, it goes without saying that such quotes would be favorable, and not to criticize.”¹⁶ Matthews further inquired about the publication date of the Bible used by Joseph Smith in the New Translation and wondered if he might view it and other related documents, including the Bible revision manuscripts, if he visited the Church Historian’s office in Missouri. In closing, Matthews referred to his “word by word comparison” of the King James Version with the *Inspired Version* and noted that “this has been a very rewarding study [and] has given me an appreciation for the Inspired Version.”¹⁷ Matthews recalled receiving a written denial of this request to see the original documents.¹⁸

Four years later, in May 1964, Davies wrote the RLDS First Presidency summarizing ten issues related to preservation plans for the New Translation manuscripts, which were in “poor condition.” The issue of preservation and archival protocol for access to aging artifacts became a pivotal point around which many denials turned. In a fair-handed manner, both RLDS and LDS researchers were generally denied access to these fragile documents. Davies noted that photographic preservation was “highly technical and therefore, costly,” but he sought permission to proceed with making an adequate copy that could be used for scholarly study. He assured the First Presidency that “Brother [Richard] Howard or myself may stand by in their work rooms while the material is prepared and the valuable document, therefore, under continual observation.”¹⁹ Davies received approval for the proposed preservation project from the First Presidency on June 25, 1964.²⁰ However, due to inadequate technology, the duplication attempt was not altogether successful.

Of the need and early efforts to preserve and protect the original manuscripts, Howard, the assistant church historian, later wrote: “The original MSS of the JSBR were at many points deteriorating, and offered a real challenge in terms of microfilming or other types of photoduplication. . . .

16. Robert J. Matthews to Charles A. Davies, May 16, 1960. While this letter was referred to in the First Presidency letter file, it is not found there. Matthews provided a copy of the letter to the author in 2003.

17. Matthews to Davies, May 16, 1960.

18. Neither the letter file nor Matthews’s personal files contained a copy of this response.

19. Charles A. Davies to First Presidency, May 13, 1964.

20. First Presidency to Charles A. Davies, June 25, 1964.

It was not until 1968 that the Xerox copyflow process in Kansas City could be implemented to make a satisfactory [copy]. . . . And it was only then that I felt easy about opening up the JSBR MSS for scholarly access.”²¹

In February 1965, Reed Durham was working on his doctoral dissertation at Brigham Young University and also had requested permission to see the New Translation manuscripts. Howard informed him that “there have been in recent months several other inquiries from students of your church along similar lines [and that] we have not been able to grant their requests.”²² No rationale for the denial was given, but the letter closed with the “wish that we could offer more help to you, but your requests cannot be granted at this time.”²³

A few weeks later, Geoffrey Spencer, an RLDS leader in Australia who later became a member of the Council of Twelve, wrote First Presidency counselor Maurice Draper about certain concerns. Spencer asked Draper for access to a list of all changes made in the 1944 edition of the *Inspired Version* from the previous 1936 edition. Spencer was making a painstaking comparison and wished to expedite his work so he might “classify [changes] in such a way as to permit some analysis of the trends and patterns of revision.”²⁴ The 1944 title page addition of “A New Corrected Edition” created a stir among both RLDS and LDS members. RLDS readers, like Spencer, wondered what had been “corrected” and on what basis those changes had been made. Additionally, LDS commentators wondered who had authority to make changes to the Prophet Joseph Smith’s work.²⁵

21. Richard P. Howard to Tom Sherry, January 4, 2006. Reprinted in appendix A, point 2.

22. Like Matthews, Durham was an LDS Church educator during this period. His completed dissertation was titled, “A History of Joseph Smith’s Revision of the Bible” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1965). While Howard referred to “several other” LDS inquirers, the only additional one identified in the archive letters was BYU faculty member Paul Cheesman, who sought permission to do a side-by-side column comparison of the KJV Bible with the JST. All correspondence from Cheesman was conducted on his behalf by attorney Lawrence Foster. See letters of May 7, June 3, and June 18, 1965.

23. Richard P. Howard to Reed C. Durham, February 25, 1965.

24. Geoffrey F. Spencer to Maurice Draper, March 18, 1965.

25. For example, Mark E. Petersen wondered whether such corrections had been done by RLDS leaders “to suit their own desires,” thus making their work of “questionable value.” Petersen, *As Translated Correctly* (Salt Lake City, Deseret Book, 1966), 29–31. For more on the 1944 title page addition, see the last paragraph of the preface in that edition. Matthews’s assessment of it appears in *A Plainer Translation*, 171–74.

Knowing of a planned centennial edition of the *Inspired Version*, Spencer argued for a more scholarly, frank, and informative body of information on the translation, noting that he had “yet to see an accurate, detailed examination and evaluation.” Despite his desire, he relayed that such scholarly examinations were “almost universally ignored here, and in some places strongly resented and opposed as being ‘heretical.’”²⁶ Spencer’s observation highlights what was becoming an increasing chasm between beliefs of many RLDS Church members and an evolving theology among the leadership.

Draper responded to Spencer’s concerns by informing him that the Church had decided not to proceed with the centennial edition of the *Inspired Version* after all. Draper also hoped that when a report requested by the First Presidency on the *Inspired Version* came from the Historical Department that it would “give us a thorough evaluation of the Inspired Version history, text, etc.”²⁷ Though Draper passed Spencer’s request for a list of changes to the Church Historian and Herald House, no one has been able to locate such a list.

Draper’s letter is particularly important because it shows that the RLDS First Presidency had already responded to various queries and concerns about the *Inspired Version* by asking the Church Historian, Charles A. Davies, to prepare a “thorough evaluation” of Joseph Smith’s work on the Bible.²⁸ Given the length and detail contained in the report, it is obvious that Davies received the request well before Spencer’s letter arrived.

Davies completed “Problems in the Inspired Version,” a 151-page report for the First Presidency, in 1965. In it he drew five major conclusions: (1) The 1867 *Inspired Version* published by the “Reorganization Committee” was a conscious redaction of several varying manuscript versions and hence the final product was one of the committee, not necessarily of Joseph Smith; (2) such elements of inspiration the manuscripts may possess were likely created in the spirit of the RLDS Doctrine and Covenants sections 8 and 9; (3) later corrections and transcriptions of Joseph Smith were influenced by his study of Hebrew after 1835; (4) the printed text is not exactly as found in the manuscripts; and (5) the manuscripts were “obviously incomplete in 1844.” The Davies report became a crucial fulcrum point for tipping RLDS opinions of the New Translation, eventually calling forth a revision of some

26. Geoffrey Spencer to Maurice Draper, March 18, 1965. Later, Spencer published “A Reinterpretation of Inspiration, Revelation and L.D.S. Scripture,” *University Bulletin* 20 (Winter 1968): 41–51.

27. Maurice L. Draper to Geoffrey F. Spencer, March 25, 1965.

28. Maurice L. Draper to Charles A. Davies, March 25, 1965.

central beliefs held by RLDS leaders relative to the place and value of Joseph Smith's Bible revision along with the general revelatory nature of the translation (and by implication, other works of Joseph Smith).²⁹

About the time Davies submitted his report, his health failed. Soon after, Richard Howard, who had helped prepare the report, became acting historian (June 1965). Of the report's importance, Howard noted:

The implications of the Davies report were far reaching, in that an effort by the RLDS Council of Twelve to sponsor a church-wide festival, or institute, in honor of the centennial of the publication of the first edition of the JSBR, was sidetracked by the First Presidency's concern over the need for a thoroughgoing revisionism with respect to historic claims for the JSBR the RLDS church had been making for a whole century.³⁰

Coinciding with new concern over the *Inspired Version's* historical and revelatory integrity among RLDS leaders was an ironic emergence of a positive assessment in LDS publications. In May 1965, the RLDS First Presidency received a note from Aleah Koury. Koury, of the RLDS Council of Twelve, informed the leaders that the *Improvement Era*, the official LDS Church periodical, had recently carried a four-part series by Matthews titled "The Inspired Revision of the Bible" and that each of the monthly articles was "favorable."³¹ Soon after, over 650 copies of the *Inspired Version* had been sold in Utah bookstores—more than the highest yearly total to date. Koury assumed this news would be of interest to the First Presidency and stated, "I do not know why the Utah church is placing this emphasis upon the Inspired Version at this time, but I felt it was worthy of your attention."³²

29. A copy of the report is in the author's possession. The study was never published, and while it is 151 pages long, only the first 47 pages constitute the critical analysis section, with the "Conclusions" being found on page 47. I know of no later studies by either LDS or RLDS writers that question conclusions 1, 4, or 5. Scribal handwriting identification shows that conclusion 3 was incorrect. See Faulring, Jackson, and Matthews, *Joseph Smith's New Translation of the Bible*, 5–8. The most active controversy continues around the meaning and implications of conclusion 2.

30. Howard to Sherry, reprinted in appendix A, point 1.

31. The articles ran in the *Improvement Era* from February to May 1965. Matthews introduced the series by noting, "Members of the [LDS] Church are aware that the Prophet made this [Bible] revision, but since it has had but scant use by them, its content and value are only slightly appreciated." The four articles were titled: "The Making of the Inspired Version," "Some Significant Texts of the Inspired Translation," "Some Textual Changes Relating to the Mission of Jesus Christ and also the Prophets," and "The Value of the Inspired Version."

32. Aleah Koury to First Presidency, May 19, 1965.

Thus, 1965 was becoming a watershed year in RLDS considerations of the New Translation. Concerns from those outside the administration (both RLDS and LDS), the Davies report, and growing questions from certain RLDS Church administrators worked together to move the organization forward in new directions. The whole concept of hierarchical revelation to prophets in the RLDS tradition and its binding nature on others was shifting, and issues related to the *Inspired Version* helped fuel the discussion. This concern was explored in a later publication by Howard when he questioned the “doctrine of infallibility concerning the prophet’s statements made under inspiration” and concluded that the “church is confronted squarely with the question of the human element in revelation and scripture.”³³

In May 1965, President F. Henry Edwards wrote fellow members of the First Presidency reporting on his thorough review of Davies’s work and characterizing it as “scholarly and helpful.” The report “confronts us with a necessity for a series of decisions,” and Edwards suggested three possible courses of action: (1) seek to prevent its publication; (2) begin a proposed five-year project of offering to members findings from the report according to the “capacity of our people to absorb this information;” or (3) publish the study as is.³⁴

Edwards felt the most responsible of these choices was to pursue the second course. He went on to suggest revisions to the preface material in future editions of the *Inspired Version*. Davies’s report highlighted certain issues relative to the nature of that work and to the Church’s historical presentation of it, and Edwards recognized that the Church’s posture regarding it might have to undergo significant revision. Such revisionism included “our attitude toward the other revelatory work of Joseph.”³⁵

During this period in his newly assumed role as acting historian, Howard turned his attention to the ongoing turmoil created by continued requests for access to the New Translation manuscripts. In September he wrote to the First Presidency, “Pursuant to my conversation with President Smith yesterday I am addressing to the First Presidency a document setting

33. Richard P. Howard, “Latter Day Saint Scriptures and the Doctrine of Propositional Revelation,” *Courage: A Journal of History, Thought and Action* 1, no. 4 (June 1971): 219, 224. In the article, he also stated that in light of professionalism in the fields of history, theology, and philosophy, “what is now needed, among both leaders and members, is a serious reevaluation of both the content and character of LDS revelation and scriptures” (210).

34. F. Henry Edwards to W. Wallace Smith and Maurice L. Draper, May 25, 1965.

35. Edwards to Smith and Draper, May 25, 1965.

forth my concerns relative to research privileges in our manuscript sources of Restoration Scriptures.” Howard asked for modification in a policy, crafted the previous winter, about research privileges that made “available upon request, either in original or in photoduplication [access to] manuscript sources of Restoration Scriptures.”³⁶

Howard noted that the previously completed photoduplication of the original New Translation manuscripts had not produced a perfectly faithful copy. Thus, researchers often sought permission to verify text from the delicate and deteriorating original. This fact, along with other concerns, led Howard to repeatedly decline requests for access despite the formerly stated policy that had allowed for some exceptions.³⁷

In addition to concerns about technical considerations, Howard also expressed pointed caution over a policy of general access to these documents, regardless of the researchers’ intent or quality of scholarship and whether they came from within or without RLDS membership. He noted that once published, information entered the public domain and critics would seek to use the information to their ends: “I look ahead to consider the misuse, misquotation, misrepresentation of these materials . . . by people who have been waiting for decades to attack the foundations of the Reorganization.”³⁸

Finally, Howard expressed his concern for the faith of believers who would be better served having new information of this sort presented by scholarly and faithful RLDS members in a way that could best “promote the Christian witness of the institution and . . . nurture the membership on a sound basis.”³⁹

Not fully persuaded by Howard’s arguments, the First Presidency replied that research on original scripture documents “is going to go on whether we like it or not” and that “our discretion in this field does not extend to the suppression of access to historical sources.” They recommended having a sufficiently large corps of historians to “stay ahead” of non-RLDS-sponsored publications by making “such presentations and explanations as the situation warrants.” The First Presidency closed with an invitation for Howard to formulate a revised policy statement concerning “scripture material in our possession,” if he felt one was needed.⁴⁰

36. Richard P. Howard to First Presidency, September 9, 1965.

37. Howard to First Presidency, September 9, 1965.

38. Howard to First Presidency, September 9, 1965.

39. Howard to First Presidency, September 9, 1965.

40. First Presidency to Richard P. Howard, October 1, 1965.

On the same day, but under separate cover, the First Presidency sent Howard an invitation to begin preparing questions and articles for the *Saints' Herald*, the Church's periodical, dealing with issues raised in the Davies report, thus making "information available to the church and to the public without promoting undue division. . . . We have in mind that the major aspects of this report should in time become part of our contemporary literature. We think it should be done carefully in view of the fact that . . . some of our people have preconceived notions which might be very difficult to correct."⁴¹

Two months later, the First Presidency again emphasized to Howard the hope that Church-published treatments of key findings from the Davies report would make the information available to members, "whose present misinformation, or lack of information, might make it difficult for them to face the facts as they are in the Davies report."⁴²

Howard responded to access concerns with a revised recommendation on December 23, 1965: "Attached hereto is my final draft of a policy statement on access to the Inspired Version manuscripts." The policy justified denying access to the original manuscripts based on its fragile condition, lack of adequate photoduplication possibilities, and "potential misrepresentation of their content and background by persons not in a position to make accurate and responsible appraisal and interpretations of data contained therein."⁴³

Six days after receiving Howard's policy recommendation, First Presidency member F. Henry Edwards wrote Church President W. Wallace Smith regarding some disgruntlement by RLDS members, Apostle Clifford Cole, and Elder Jacque Pement, who had been precluded from studying the original New Translation manuscripts. They had assumed that access for purposes of a historical and exegetical study of Matthew 26 would be granted, but having been denied such according to the recently revised policy, they contacted President Edwards, who in turn wrote a letter to keep President Smith informed. Edwards questioned whether the current ban on access was correctly crafted and opined that situations such as this "cannot fail to damage us. Nor can word of this fail to hurt us with our own academic community."⁴⁴

41. First Presidency to Richard P. Howard, October 1, 1965.

42. First Presidency to Richard P. Howard, December 8, 1965.

43. Richard P. Howard to First Presidency, December 23, 1965.

44. Frank H[enry]. Edwards to W. Wallace Smith, December 29, 1965. For reflections on this unfortunate denial of access to Pement, see Howard to Sherry, reprinted in appendix A, point 5.

Matthews Again Seeks Permission

In September 1966, Matthews wrote yet another letter, this time to President W. Wallace Smith. After introducing himself to President Smith, Matthews reviewed his background in *Inspired Version* studies and reiterated his hope for access to the original manuscripts and the “marked Bible” for further study. (The results of this research were intended for use in his doctoral dissertation.) Matthews assured President Smith that while he was a member of the Utah Church, he knew that the New Translation “represents much of great value from the Prophet Joseph” and that he had “never found occasion to speak or write in any way that could be taken as uncomplimentary to the Reorganized Church in their work with the Bible.” Matthews further stated that he had “no hidden motives in making this request [though] some have taken a less than enthusiastic view of the Inspired Version (especially of the 1944 edition) and have thus lessened the real value that this Bible has. . . . I am approaching you as a friend and as one interested in the Prophet Joseph’s work with the Bible.”⁴⁵

President Smith forwarded the letter to Howard, who crafted a response on behalf of the presidency. In it he noted numerous, similar requests that came to the Church and the resulting policy that had been drafted. Howard cited three reasons for denying Matthews the access he desired: (1) graduate-level studies had already been initiated by scholars within the RLDS Church; (2) the manuscripts’ fragile and deteriorating condition; and (3) a lack of available photostatic copies suitable for accurate research.⁴⁶

Matthews was frustrated by this response and wrote back the following month. He pressed President Smith to reconsider, arguing that “as long as our people feel that the printed text presented by your Church has been revised, the literary value for proving the restoration is substantially lessened.” By gaining access to the manuscripts, Matthews asserted, he would be able to “show sufficient evidence that the printed text presents the words exactly as the Prophet put them.” Additionally,

there simply needs to be someone from Utah who also is permitted to make a careful study of the Inspired Translation with the original sources. It isn’t a matter of scholarship. Your people will do the work as well as anyone. But I’m certain that the largest group of people who accept Joseph Smith as a prophet will never appreciate the significance of this work with the Bible until someone from outside of your church is allowed to publish a first-hand report.⁴⁷

45. Robert J. Matthews to W. Wallace Smith, September 5, 1966.

46. First Presidency to Robert J. Matthews, September 14, 1966.

47. Robert J. Matthews to W. Wallace Smith, October 18, 1966. In later reflection on this rather daring and confrontational letter, Matthews felt he “may have

Finally, Matthews relayed to President Smith that some “prominent sources in the Church in Utah, in the past year or so, . . . have strongly asserted that the text of the Inspired Translation as published by you is unreliable. It is to counteract this influence that helps to urge me on. I believe the printed text is reliable, but need the chance to prove it.”⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that in the absence of access to the original manuscripts, Matthews’s chief interest was verifying textual accuracy in the printed Bible. On the other hand, RLDS leaders who more or less understood issues of textual accuracy were grappling with the implications and meaning of the changes as presented in the Davies report.

In response, the First Presidency requested that Elder John W. Bradley, an RLDS member living in Utah, “investigate [Matthews’s] standing at Brigham Young University and with the academic community, as to whether or not he would be accepted as an authority if he wrote in this field,” and to give his opinion of Matthews’s “sincerity and integrity.” They further asked Bradley for his opinion on Matthews’s assertion that certain “Mormon leaders” discredited the reliability of the *Inspired Version* in an effort to “stem any possible movement on the part of a number of Mormons to find another evidence of the divine guidance which Joseph Smith might have had in establishing the Restoration Movement”—an ironic concern given the emerging importance being assigned to the Davies report.⁴⁹

Like Bradley, Wayne Ham, an RLDS member who was formerly a graduate student at Brigham Young University, received a similar request from the First Presidency.⁵⁰ Ham responded to President W. Wallace Smith after having inquired with “some Mormon friends” who identified Matthews as an apologist, meaning he “would leave no stone unturned that would put the Inspired Version in a favorable light and he would, at the same time, do his best to throw up a smoke screen around any data that could be interpreted unfavorably.” Ham assumed Matthews was sincere and that his “overarching ambition . . . is to validate the prophetic ministry of your grandfather.”⁵¹

been a little too strong at one point.” See Hauglid and Huntington, “Robert J. Matthews and His Work,” 32.

48. Matthews to Smith, October 18, 1966.

49. First Presidency to John W. Bradley, October 21, 1966.

50. Ham had graduated from BYU in 1961 with a master’s degree in Biblical languages. At the time of this request, he was working in the RLDS Department of Religious Education. While the specific request to Ham is not in the archived letters, he referred to the First Presidency request in his response on October 24, 1966.

51. Wayne Ham to First Presidency, October 24, 1966.

Four days after Ham's letter was written, Bradley crafted his reply, affirming "without hesitation that the Mormon hierarchy is attempting to depreciate the Inspired Version [and that] this is an attempt to neutralize an otherwise extremely effective missionary tool of the R.L.D.S. Church." Bradley went on to "strongly recommend a prompt word-by-word comparison of the pre-1944 edition with the current one [with an] explanation of every change. . . . I see no other way to present the Inspired Version with the scholarly integrity it deserves." At the close of this letter is a handwritten note attached with a letterhead stamp "From the Desk of Fred L. Young," the general secretary of the RLDS Church as well as the executive secretary to the First Presidency. The note read: "I wonder how much weight Matthews would carry if he did publish? Would he be convinced or confused?"⁵²

In late October, just prior to Bradley's reply, Howard again approached the First Presidency after having read Matthews's most recent letter. Howard noted that Matthews "does not give up easily" and observed that the current request is actually the fourth received on this subject. Howard urged the First Presidency to again decline the request, reiterating reasons listed in former denials and citing issues relative to *Inspired Version* text that involved problems and discrepancies between printed versions. Howard asked the First Presidency if they really wanted various historical and doctrinal issues to be published by "Utah Mormon interpreters," which would in essence leave to the Utah Church the "educational function of enlightenment of our own people regarding some rather new and sensitive intelligence about the Inspired Version and its historical development." He also stated that the manuscripts could not do what Matthews hoped in "proving whether Joseph's corrections were in fact a restoration of the 'original text.'" Finally, he noted that RLDS scholars were working with the manuscripts at present and that it is a "universal practice of archival administration" to refuse additional access to documents while they are being studied by others.⁵³ Howard concluded, "In view of these considerations, therefore, I strongly advise that reconsideration of the former decision result in a final negative reply to Mr. Matthews."⁵⁴

Howard drafted a proposed reply to Matthews for First Presidency consideration. It once again denied Matthews access to the New Translation manuscripts but reiterated the First Presidency's former offer to make

52. John W. Bradley to First Presidency, October 28, 1966.

53. The major study being pursued at this time by an RLDS scholar was the previously cited book by Howard, *Restoration Scriptures*, which was first published in 1969. His second edition represented a major revision of that text and was published just after Howard finished his service as Church Historian in 1994.

54. Richard P. Howard to First Presidency, October 26, 1966.

available future published material on this subject. Years later Howard wrote that his “resistance to giving Matthews or anyone else access, in retrospect, was forcefully put in the context of every argument I could muster, as I was needing time to get the photoduplication successfully achieved before opening this archival treasure to general research. . . . My resistance was also, with the gift of hindsight, a little too strong.”⁵⁵

In mid-November 1966, Bradley wrote yet again to the First Presidency. He inquired about Matthews’s academic stature and reported reading his series of articles on the *Inspired Version* in the LDS periodical *Improvement Era*. Bradley concluded that Matthews was genuine, enthusiastic, and regarded as a respected authority on the subject among Utah Mormons. In fact, Matthews had taken a “more faithful position than that taken by some of our own people and is frowned upon by the Mormon hierarchy.” Bradley further asserted that “Matthews is one of the few Mormon authorities who is genuinely respectful to the printed text of the Inspired Version [though he] would be subject to sub-conscious, if not deliberate, bias.”⁵⁶

Bradley suggested a plan of action that addressed the need for further scholarly study of the *Inspired Version* while not turning “any Mormon loose, without supervision or control.” He recommended appointing a competent and respected RLDS scholar to head a team of researchers that would include “Mr. Matthews [from the LDS Church]; a representative of the Hedrickites, one from the Bickertonites, and one ‘uncommitted scholar’” and that would eventually produce a joint report. Such a report “would gain validity from the inter-denominational approach [and] I believe our church would gain great respect, and that the Inspired Version would become much more widely accepted through such an approach.” Bradley concluded that such an effort would be

a landmark in R.L.D.S. sponsored scholarship [and it] presents a unique opportunity to turn the attention and respect of the factions toward the Reorganized Church. This could be a ministry of reconciliation as well as scholarship. Here is a chance to “call them in” to our headquarters for a cooperative study of our documentary sources of a scripture basic and relevant to us all.⁵⁷

Similar to others outside the RLDS Church hierarchy, Bradley’s letters reveal that he was unfamiliar with the perceived difficulties administrators were wrestling with regarding the *Inspired Version* and the nature of Joseph Smith’s revelatory activities, as explored in the Davies report.

55. Howard to Sherry, reprinted in appendix A, point 4.

56. John W. Bradley to First Presidency, November 15, 1966.

57. John W. Bradley to First Presidency, November 15, 1966.

In early December, Howard again wrote President Smith regarding Bradley's communication. Howard forcefully stated "as custodian of these MSS, my concern in this matter could be considered of a primary nature." Howard maintained his former position of denying Matthews access to the original *Inspired Version* manuscripts and concluded, "There is much, much more at stake here than Mr. Matthews' sincerity and integrity."⁵⁸ While Howard's denials were, at that time, set in a context of balancing his many responsibilities as Church Historian and guardian over the manuscripts, he would eventually be the one to open the way for Matthews to finally examine the documents and to facilitate his research.

There was another undercurrent that affected the direction of the RLDS Church in its developing approach to issues concerning the New Translation. Increasingly, members struggled with a perceived change in Church direction on the translation and expressed their displeasure. In April 1967, Church Education leader Don Landon forwarded a letter from William Wilson, a disgruntled member in Maine, to the First Presidency regarding a visiting Church leader's use of the Phillips translation of the Bible rather than the *Inspired Version*. Landon noted, "It is this kind of viewpoint that creates considerable difficulties in the field and suggests the urgency of our need to educate the Saints regarding the place and purpose of the Inspired Version."⁵⁹

The First Presidency clarified that while the Church affirmed the inspiration of the *Inspired Version*, "it has never claimed that this work was in every way complete or that it fully compensates for the various inadequacies of the King James or other versions of the Scriptures. Since this is true, it is hardly possible to conclude that loyalty to the church and its message requires the exclusive use of the Inspired Version by our priesthood or members." The letter went on to cite the value of modern scholarly translations that also may have been blessed by "the ministry of the Holy Spirit" and thus are of use to "all who diligently seek with the prayer of faith and in the spirit of humility the greatest clarity of understanding."⁶⁰

Two months later, in June 1967, the First Presidency clarified the matter further in a letter to Richard Counts. Counts had earlier expressed his serious disillusionment over the Church's published references from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible in the *Saints' Herald*. His letter challenged President Smith with the responsibility to hold up the *Inspired Version* as the "only true Bible."⁶¹ In response, the First Presidency

58. Richard P. Howard to W. Wallace Smith, December 6, 1966.

59. William Wilson to First Presidency, April 13, 1967.

60. First Presidency to William Wilson, April 19, 1967.

61. Richard Counts to First Presidency, April 5, 1967.

expressed appreciation for the sincerity of Counts and the right for him to hold his personal beliefs but that such did not necessarily reflect the position of the Church. The First Presidency went on to note that “a great deal of study has been done on the origin of the manuscript of the Inspired Version . . . and from time to time you will be enlightened in this regard as articles occasionally appear.” While they affirmed a “large degree of divinity in the work of Joseph Smith,” still, “there is nothing which prescribes the exclusive use of the Inspired Version.”⁶²

By the end of 1967, several studies of the *Inspired Version* appeared in print. In September, the Department of Religious Education published a “Position Paper” titled “The Nature of Scripture and Its Use in the Life of the Church.” That was joined by F. Henry Edwards’s three significant articles digesting findings from the Davies report for the general membership in the *Saints’ Herald* of November and December.⁶³ Additionally, several other educational publications in Church periodicals had been presented to members just as F. Henry Edwards of the First Presidency had recommended.

In 1968, Howard was wrapping up preparation on his forthcoming study of the New Translation and other “restoration scriptures,” which became a landmark in RLDS publications. The Davies study and Howard’s extensive research had culminated in “an accurate, detailed examination and evaluation of the Inspired Version” envisioned by Church leaders three years earlier.⁶⁴

Entries in the letter file became less frequent after this, with only eleven items between 1968 and the close of the file in 1975—and most of those dealt with minor publication concerns.

Matthews Receives Permission

With so much having been accomplished by 1968, along with the firm position of the First Presidency about not “suppressing access to historical sources,”⁶⁵ the stage was set to reconsider Matthews’s requests. Matthews distinctly remembered receiving permission in a phone conversation with

62. First Presidency to Richard Counts, June 12, 1967.

63. “The Bible in the Early Restoration,” *Saints’ Herald*, November 15, 1967, 762–64, 768; “The publication of the Inspired Version of the Holy Scriptures,” *Saints’ Herald*, December 1, 1967, 804–6; and “The Inspired Version Today,” *Saints’ Herald*, December 15, 1967, 843–45.

64. Spencer to First Presidency, March 18, 1965.

65. First Presidency to Richard P. Howard, October 1, 1965. See also Edwards to Smith, December 29, 1965, and First Presidency to Bradley, October 21, 1966.

Howard in late spring 1968. And on June 20, Matthews finally made his first visit to see the New Translation manuscripts and “marked Bible.”⁶⁶ He recalled: “I wrote [Howard] and said, ‘If I came to Independence, would you show me the manuscript?’ And he wrote back and said yes. I thought he didn’t understand, so I called him on the phone. He said, ‘Yes, yes. You can come.’ That’s how I finally got to see the manuscript.”⁶⁷

For years, Matthews simply thought that Davies and other RLDS Church administrators did not want to accommodate his interests. Little did he know that Howard was actually writing most of the denial letters on behalf of the Church. Charles Davies died in November 1965, and shortly afterward Richard Howard was appointed church historian. In 1968, Matthews wrote Howard hoping that a change of administration would yield a change of position. When Matthews finally received permission to view the manuscripts, it seemed to confirm this assumption. In recalling this period, he said, “I originally contacted their historian, whose name was Charles Davies, and he said no two or three times. I tried their president, who was W. Wallace Smith, and he said no two or three times. So the first real flesh-and-blood contact that I had was Richard P. Howard, who was a gentleman and a fine man and a good scholar. The first time I went there, he showed me the marked Bible.”⁶⁸ In another interview, Matthews added:

As I’ve indicated, for many years they would not let me see the original manuscript. But they had a change of personnel, and sometimes that makes a big difference in any organization. The former historian had passed away, and a new man came in, Richard P. Howard. He had different views. He had a master’s degree in history from Berkeley, and when I wrote to him and asked if I could come, he said yes.⁶⁹

But it was not, in reality, a simple “change of administration” that opened the door for Matthews’s study of the manuscripts. By 1968, those changes that had been largely stimulated by the completion of major studies and publications on the translation were also augmented by technologically adequate photo duplication capability, which finally allowed for a preservation copy of the manuscripts, thus removing a significant access obstacle. Additionally, since the *Inspired Version* was no longer the only Church-sanctioned Bible translation, it became less important to protect and limit access to the fragile manuscripts. Indeed, such limitations increasingly

66. Baugh, “Teacher, Scholar, Administrator,” 126. Also see Howard to Sherry, reprinted in appendix A, point 2.

67. Hauglid and Huntington, “Robert J. Matthews and His Work,” 32.

68. Hauglid and Huntington, “Robert J. Matthews and His Work,” 33.

69. Baugh, “Teacher, Scholar, Administrator,” 125–26.

came to be viewed by administrators as contrary to the best interests of the RLDS Church.

The stage was set and Matthews's persistence and reputation placed him in a position to benefit from the times. His access to the manuscripts and studies that followed changed the course of LDS history. For LDS

Concerning the JST, Robert J. Matthews declared: "Every person who has joined the Church since 1831 has been affected by the JST, even though he or she did not know it. It was in the JST where the revelation was first given on the age of accountability for baptism. Then, in 1832, the revelation on the three degrees of glory was an outgrowth of his work with the Bible. Most of what we know about Adam and Melchizedek and eternal marriage and priesthood organization originated in the JST. There are many things that were outgrowths of revelation received while he was working with the Bible. It is a very prominent and important part of our history, and it ought to be a part of our present understanding. With the footnotes and the appendix in our edition of the Bible, I think the decision has already been made by the Brethren that the JST should be a part of our scripture study. Had it not been so, it would never have been put in this new edition of the Bible."

In analyzing the process Joseph Smith went through as he worked on the JST, Brother Matthews further explained: "There is a great lesson for all of us in that because in reading the Bible and concentrating, praying, and meditating, the Prophet Joseph received revelation. That is the way the Lord teaches the gospel to His people. When you study the scriptures, you are going to learn and receive revelation. The Prophet Joseph was inspired to make many corrections and alterations, as well as to add much new background information in various places in the Bible. Reading the JST is like having Joseph Smith for a study companion because you get his views on how he understood certain things."

Source: Ray L. Huntington and Brian M. Hauglid, "Robert J. Matthews and His Work with the Joseph Smith Translation," *Religious Educator*, 5 no. 2:45–46.

Church leaders, Matthews's experience and scholarly publications resolved doubts and removed "the last logical obstacle to the use of the Prophet's work on the inspired translation."⁷⁰ Though unexpected at the outset, Matthews's eventual corpus of publications was not limited only to verifying textual accuracy, as he initially intended. His many scholarly studies, along with those of others who followed, led the LDS Church to a renewed position of respect and value for the doctrinal and historical contributions made by Joseph Smith in his Bible revision. Indeed, for the LDS Church, the New Translation has been perceived as one of the great evidences affirming the divinity of Joseph Smith's role as "a seer, a translator, a prophet" (LDS Doctrine & Covenants 21:1).

This historic change has been captured well in two statements by Elders Neal A. Maxwell and Dallin H. Oaks of the LDS Church's Quorum of the Twelve Apostles. During the preparation of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, a question came to Elder Maxwell about the appropriateness of frequent references to the JST in that publication. He responded, "I do not know of any of the present First Presidency or Quorum of the Twelve who question in any way the use of quotations from the Joseph Smith Translation. . . . I believe they would be disappointed if you did not use [it] extensively. As you may have noted, I frequently use the Joseph Smith Translation in my own writings, as do others of my brethren."⁷¹ And Elder Oaks added that while it is not canonized, "there should be no doubt about the current status of the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. . . . As a member of the royal family of scripture it should be noticed and honored on any occasion when it is present."⁷²

After Joseph Smith's death, his wife Emma and their son Joseph Smith III, along with subsequent RLDS Church leaders and historians, kept the sacred commandment to "preserve in safety" and to publish the New Translation.⁷³ Additionally, the RLDS letter file dealing with the *Inspired Version* of the Bible shows how Robert J. Matthews played a critical role in making available to the LDS Church the Prophet's biblical revision—"a work destined to be greater and have more significance than any of us have yet realized."⁷⁴

70. Dallin H. Oaks, "Scripture Reading, Revelation, and Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible," in *Plain and Precious Truths Restored*, 10.

71. Elder Neal A. Maxwell to Daniel H. Ludlow, cited in Ludlow, "The Old Testament: A Witness for Christ," a speech delivered at the Fifteenth Annual Church Educational System Symposium, August 13–15, 1991, at Brigham Young University.

72. Oaks, "Scripture Reading, Revelation, and Joseph Smith's Translation of the Bible," 13.

73. Community of Christ D&C 42:15a; Latter-day Saint D&C 42:56.

74. An assessment by Elder Bruce R. McConkie, "The Doctrinal Restoration," 10.

Throughout his career, Robert J. Matthews (1926–2009) published on a wide variety of topics, but he is often remembered most for his pioneering research on the Joseph Smith Translation. The following articles that he authored or coauthored appeared in *BYU Studies*:

- “A Plainer Translation’: Joseph Smith’s Translation of the Bible; A History and Commentary,” 16, no. 2 (1976).
- “The ‘New Translation’ of the Bible, 1830–1833: Doctrinal Development during the Kirtland Era,” 11, no. 4 (1971).
- “The Bernhisel Manuscript Copy of Joseph Smith’s Inspired Version of the Bible,” 11, no. 3 (1971).
- “Joseph Smith’s Revision of the Bible,” 10, no. 4 (1970).
- “Some Significant Texts of Joseph Smith’s Inspired Version of the Bible,” 9, no. 2 (1969).
- “A Study of the Text of Joseph Smith’s Inspired Version of the Bible,” 9, no. 1 (1969).

In conclusion, Matthews’s developing reputation as a scholar, along with his persistent interest in and efforts to gain access to the original New Translation manuscripts, occurred during a period in RLDS Church history that included evolving views relative to the publication, assessment, and use of the *Inspired Version*.⁷⁵ Those developments, along with advances in archival preservation of the original manuscripts, resulted in the phone call with RLDS Church Historian Richard Howard, allowing Matthews to study the documents. Ironically, as the RLDS Church’s interest in and commitment to Joseph Smith’s revelations decreased, they rose to new prominence in the LDS Church.

75. For a Community of Christ assessment of Matthews and this period of RLDS history, see “A Community of Christ Perspective on the JST research of Robert J. Matthews: An Interview with Ronald E. Romig,” *The Religious Educator*, Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 5 no. 2 (2004): 49–55.

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Appendix A

Richard Howard's Response (January 4, 2006)

Editor's note: This article was reviewed by the Community of Christ archivist, Ronald E. Romig, and former Church Historian, Richard P. Howard, prior to its publication. Howard was invited to respond, and this appendix contains the complete text of his comments.

Hi Tom,

Ron Romig sent me a copy of your forthcoming article on the background of Robert Matthews' efforts to gain access to the Joseph Smith Bible Revision [JSBR] manuscripts, and his work on the book that he wrote about the "Plainer Translation" after he finally did gain that access. I have a few comments that may shed just a little light on the subject of your paper.

1. Charles Davies finished his report to the RLDS First Presidency in the spring of 1965, just weeks before his health failed. I was appointed acting historian in late June of that year. The implications of the Davies report were far reaching, in that an effort by the RLDS Council of Twelve to sponsor a church-wide festival, or institute, in honor of the centennial of the publication of the first edition of the JSBR, was sidetracked by the First Presidency's concern over the need for a thoroughgoing revisionism with respect to historic claims for the JSBR the RLDS church had been making for a whole century. Most of those claims, it seemed to me at the time (1965) were untenable, in light of the Davies study conclusions, which I shared. I had done much of the initial surveying and calendaring of the various manuscripts and fragments. Because the conclusions were so opposed to the traditional views and assessments, I was feeling quite uncertain about granting access to the manuscripts until more formal handling of the Davies conclusions could go forward, and this would take time. I viewed this process as largely internal in nature.

2. The original MSS of the JSBR were at many points deteriorating, and offered a real challenge in terms of microfilming or other types of photoduplication. Davies and I had been working since the summer of 1962 with professional photographers in Kansas City, trying to produce a useful photoduplication. We were unsuccessful, and it was not until 1968 that the Xerox copyflow process in Kansas City could be implemented to make a satisfactory photoduplication of most of the MSS. It was only then, after the careful calendaring and identification of the contents of each page of the MSS had been achieved, that we could proceed with making the duplication, which would be used for most research purposes. And it was only then that I felt easy about opening up the JSBR MSS for scholarly access. That was

when I phoned Robert Matthews to invite him to use the JSBR MSS and the marked KJV Bible.

3. Toward the end of 1966, my study began into the JSBR MSS, with the hope of offering the RLDS church the possibility of a lower criticism of the JSBR text. That context was crucial to whatever conclusions might emerge from such critical study, and could offer the RLDS population a revisionism from past polemics that could bear the weight of such a transition. I was in no hurry to have other scholars working on those materials simultaneously, at least until I should be able to make substantial progress towards publication of a study.

4. My resistance to giving Matthews or anyone else access, in retrospect, was forcefully put in the context of every argument I could muster, as I was needing time to get the photoduplication successfully achieved before opening this archival treasure to general research by whoever might come along to do their analyses. My resistance was also, with the gift of hindsight, a little too strong. But in any case I could not in good conscience open those MSS until they could be researched, for the most part, in photoduplication. And that could not have happened before 1968. We had already done this with the Book of Mormon printers MS, in 1966, and those papers were available, had anyone come along to do the research.

5. The Jacques Pement/Dr. Farmer request was unfortunately put to me right in the midst of this dilemma of photoduplication limitations. Mr. Pement, on the School of the Restoration faculty, an RLDS affiliate, wanted to have the manuscripts available to him in his office there, about two miles from the archives, as he could not find time to come in during archival hours to do his work on some New Testament parts of the JSBR MSS. I would not permit the original papers to leave the archives, so gave him instead some pre-Xerox duplications of the pages he needed, produced by the headquarters Visual Arts photographer/technicians. We agreed that he would have these photocopies for a period of several months, and then return them to me after that period. When that date came Mr. Pement had not yet used the photocopies. He was very upset that he could not keep them in his office indefinitely, as he had been unable to begin his research during the agreed-to time period. He reacted negatively to church officials at headquarters.

I trust that these comments may have some value to your finalization of your paper. At least you know a little more about the grounds of my position on the matter from 1965 to 1968.

Sincerely yours,
 Richard P. Howard
 historian emeritus, Community of Christ

Appendix B

The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints: Offices & Department Figures, 1957–75

A number of figures from RLDS administrative offices are mentioned in the letters quoted from in the article and for whom some identification may be helpful:

First Presidency Presidents

Israel A. Smith (1946–1958)
W. Wallace Smith (1958–1978)

First Presidency Counselors

F. Henry Edwards (1946–1966)
W. Wallace Smith (1950–1958)
Maurice L. Draper (1958–1978)
Duane E. Couey (1966–1982)

Apostles

F. Henry Edwards (1922–1946)
W. Wallace Smith (1947–1950)
Duane Couey (1960–1966)
Aleah G. Koury (1966–1980)
Geoffrey F. Spencer (1984–1994;
President, 1990–1994)

Presidents of High Priests Quorum

Geoffrey F. Spencer (1974–1984)

Office of Presiding Bishop

G. Leslie DeLapp (1931–1966)
Walter N. Johnson (1966–1972)
Frances E. Hansen (1972–1978)

Church Historians

John Blackmore (1950–1959)
Charles Davies (1960–1965)
Richard P. Howard (1966–1994)

Assistant Church Historians

Richard P. Howard (1959–1965;
Acting Historian, 1965–1966)

Office of Church Education

Donald Landon
Wayne Ham

Church Publishing, Herald House

Chris B. Hartshorn
Audrey Stubbart
Kenneth L. Graham
Roger Yarrington
Paul A. Wellington