

surge, before my mind.” More specifically, he said, “I saw the graves open & the saints as they arose took each other by the hand . . . while setting up.”¹⁷⁰ Thus, although many emendations are editorial, the more radical of Smith’s changes to the Bible were understood by him as a function of what he saw when reading it.

Once the understandings of these passages had been revealed, however, it remained to the Prophet to exercise considerable personal effort in rendering these experiences into words:¹⁷¹

At least with respect to the JST, it appears that when he read he saw events, not words. What he saw, he verbalized to a scribe. One of Smith’s Book of Mormon scribes provided, in his own failed attempt to translate, the occasion for the most direct description of Smith’s method. “You have not understood,” God told Oliver Cowdery through Smith: “you have supposed that I would give it unto you, when you took no thought save it was to ask me. But . . . you must study it out in your mind; then you must ask me if it be right and . . . you shall feel that it is right. But if it is not right you shall have no such feelings, but you shall have a stupor of thought that shall cause you to forget that thing which is wrong; therefore you cannot write that which is sacred save it be given you from me.”¹⁷² Cowdery appears to have thought he could engage in the “inspired translation” of the Book of Mormon by parroting God’s reading. In contrast, as implied by the above statement, Smith believed it necessary to determine independently how to represent what he read or saw. The appropriate question to God by the prophet-translator was whether his interpretation was correct, not what God’s interpretation was.

Arguably, then, “translate” expressed Smith’s experience of “study[ing] it out in [his] mind” or his sense of agency in front of the text. Smith did not think of himself as God’s stenographer. Rather, he was an interpreting reader, and God the confirming authority. He did not experience revelation “as dictated, as something whispered in someone’s ear” and, thus, provides a useful illustration of Ricoeur’s argument that revelation is not propositional but “pluralistic, polysemic, and at most analogical in form.”¹⁷³ Of equal significance, however, is the manner in which Smith’s description of revelation communicates a sense of being limited by a text. It was possible to not “be right” in one’s reading. Smith experienced revelation as an interpretive response to the text: not freely associated from, but bound by the “world of the text” in front of him, even if in an altered mental state or vision. In sum, Smith’s use of “translate,” for all its discursive weaknesses, conveyed his experience of creative agency before a text and, simultaneously, his sense of being bound by the text as an account of events or as history.

With respect to the English translation of the Book of Mormon, Royal Skousen argues that the actual choice of words chosen was given under “tight control.”¹⁷⁴ However, in another place, Skousen discusses the question of whether one should assume that every change made in the JST constitutes revealed text.¹⁷⁵ Besides arguments that can be made from the actual text of the JST, there are questions regarding the reliability of and degree of supervision given to the scribes who were involved in transcribing, copying, and preparing the text for publication.¹⁷⁶ Differences are also apparent in the nature of the translation process that took place at different stages of the work. For example, while a significant proportion of the Genesis passages that have been canonized as the book of Moses “[look] like a word-for-word revealed text,” evidence from a study of two sections in the New Testament that were translated twice indicates that the later “New Testament JST is not being revealed word-for-word, but largely depends upon Joseph Smith’s varying responses to the same difficulties in the text.”¹⁷⁷

For an excellent discussion explaining why historicity neither requires inerrancy nor completeness, see Peterson¹⁷⁸ and Tanner.¹⁷⁹

0-14 About such passages, Matthews concludes that: “Some . . . portions [of the JST] may be the result of the

170 J. Smith, Jr., *Words*, 16 April 1843, pp. 196, 198.

171 K. Flake, *Translating Time*, pp. 507-508; cf. G. Underwood, *Revelation*, pp. 76-81, 83-84.

172 D&C 9:7-9.

173 P. Ricoeur, *Revelation*, pp. 76, 75.

174 R. Skousen, *Tight Control*.

175 R. Skousen, *Earliest*, pp. 456-470.

176 *Ibid.*, pp. 459-460. In “correcting” revelations for publication in the Book of Commandments, for example, though Joseph Smith had warned those involved not to “alter the sense” of the revelations (Joseph Smith, Jr. to W. W. Phelps, 31 July 1832, reproduced in J. Smith, Jr., *Writings 2002*, p. 273), Sidney Rigdon seems to have sometimes gone too far in his changes: “Whitmer often restored the original wording of many of the revelations that had been adjusted by Rigdon” (R. S. Jensen, *From Manuscript*, p. 36).

177 *Ibid.*, pp. 461-462. For the original study, see K. P. Jackson, et al., *Two Passages*.

178 D. C. Peterson, *Inerrancy*.

179 J. S. Tanner, *World and Word*.

Prophet’s analysis or minor corrections of a sort, and not necessarily the result of immediate revelation on the subject. There may be several kinds of material in the New Translation.”¹⁸⁰

0-15 In fact, in a few instances Joseph Smith specifically stated that terms that appeared later as part of the book of Abraham were better translations than the corresponding terms used in the earlier book of Moses.¹⁸¹

0-16 A new numbering for the chapter was inserted above the line of the text as shown here.

0-17 Similarly, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, who also served on the committee overseeing the new publication of the scriptures, counted this as one of three most significant developments in the Church in his lifetime—the other two being the revelation on the priesthood in 1978¹⁸² and the reestablishment of the First Quorum of the Seventy.¹⁸³

Underscoring the importance of this edition, the Church strongly recommends that English-speaking members use the LDS edition of the King James Bible, with excerpts from the Joseph Smith Translation and other extensive study helps.¹⁸⁴

0-18 For example, as formulated by Lossky, “God became man in order that man might become god.” He elaborates: “Fascinated by the *felix culpa*, we often forget that in breaking the tyranny of sin, our Savior opens to us anew the way of deification which is the final end of man.”¹⁸⁵ This teaching, he asserts was “echoed by the Fathers and theologians of every age,” citing as examples Irenaeus, Athanasius, Gregory Nazianzen, and Gregory of Nyssa.¹⁸⁶

The *Orthodox Study Bible* interprets this view quite conservatively, however, saying:¹⁸⁷

We do not become like God in His nature. That would not only be heresy, it would be impossible. For we are human, always have been human, and always will be human. We cannot take on the nature of God....¹⁸⁸

Historically, deification has often been illustrated by the example of a sword in the fire. A steel sword is thrust into a hot fire until the sword takes on a red glow. The energy of the fire interpenetrates the sword. The sword never becomes fire, but it picks up the properties of fire.

0-19 For example: “The Son of God became a man to enable men to become sons of God.”¹⁸⁹ Though it is impossible to “know what Lewis meant fully (and certainly what he understood and intended) by these statements”¹⁹⁰ his descriptions of mankind’s potential is one resonates with the beliefs of Mormonism. For example, as he wrote in another place:

The command “Be ye perfect”¹⁹¹ is not idealistic gas. Nor is it a command to do the impossible. He is going to make us into creatures that can obey that command. He said (in the Bible) that we were “gods”¹⁹² and He is going to make good His words. If we let Him—for we can prevent Him, if we choose—He will make the feeblest and filthiest of us into a god or goddess, a dazzling, radiant, immortal creature, pulsating all through with such energy and joy and wisdom and love as we cannot now imagine, a bright stainless mirror which reflects back to God perfectly (though, of course on a smaller scale) His own boundless power and delight and goodness. The process will be long and in parts very painful; but that is what we are in for. Nothing less. He meant what He said.¹⁹³

0-20 For example, Gregory of Nyssa wrote: “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”¹⁹⁴ We

180 R. J. Matthews, *Plainer*, pp. 252-253.

181 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 5 January 1841, p. 181; 17 May 1843, p. 301.

182 Official Declaration 2.

183 B. R. McConkie, *Sermons*, p. 236.

184 First Presidency of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Statement*.

185 V. Lossky, *Theology*, p. 134; cf. V. Lossky, *Image*, p. 97.

186 Irenaeus, *Heresies*, 5:Preface, p. 526; Athanasius, *Incarnation*, 54, p. 65; Gregory Nazianzen, *Apollinarius* 5-9, p. 81; Gregory of Nyssa, *Catechism* 25, p. 495. For comprehensive overviews of this topic, see N. Russell, *Deification*; J. Gross, *Divinization*. See also B. T. Ostler, *God*, pp. 391-426.

187 J. N. Sparks, et al., *Orthodox Study Bible*, p. 1692.

188 Cf. Gregory of Nyssa, cited in J. Gross, *Divinization*, p. 180. See also pp. 257, 272.

189 C. S. Lewis, *Mere*, 4:5, p. 155. See also the discussion of Emerson’s views in R. H. Brodhead, *Prophets*, pp. 22-24.

190 R. L. Millet, *Transformation*, p. 152.

191 Matthew 5:48.

192 John 10:34-36.

193 C. S. Lewis, *Mere*, 4:9, p. 176.

194 Moses 2:26.