

Why the King James Version?: From the Common to the Official Bible of Mormonism

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THE EXCELLENCE OF THE King James Version of the Bible does not need fresh documentation. No competent modern reader would question its literary excellence or its historical stature. Yet compared to several newer translations, the KJV suffocates scriptural understanding. This essay offers a historical perspective on how the LDS Church became so attached to a seventeenth-century translation of the ancient biblical texts.

To gain this perspective, we must distinguish between the sincere justifications offered by leaders and teachers in recent decades and the several historical factors that, between 1867 and 1979, transformed the KJV from the common into the official Mormon Bible. In addition to a natural love of the beauty and familiarity of KJV language, these factors include the 1867 publication of Joseph Smith's biblical revision, the nineteenth-century Protestant-Catholic conflict over governmental authorization of a single version for use in American public schools, the menace of higher criticism, the advent of new translations perceived as doctrinally dangerous, a modern popular misunderstanding of the nature of Joseph Smith's recorded revelations, and the 1979 publication of the LDS edition of the Bible. While examining these influences, I give special notice to J. Reuben Clark, who by 1956 had appropriated most previous arguments and in the process made virtually all subsequent Mormon spokespersons dependent on his logic. So influential was his work that it too must be considered a crucial factor in the evolving LDS apologetic for the King James Version.

THE COMMON INHERITED VERSION

When the Geneva Bible was published in 1560, it made no attempt to disguise its Protestant origins: its prefatory dedication to Queen Elizabeth

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expressed the optimistic hope that her majesty would see all papists put to the sword in timely fashion. The Geneva Bible's marginal notes contributed greatly to its popularity among the Protestant laity, but royalty, clergy, and Roman Catholics were disturbed by many of the notes' interpretations. The Pope naturally objected to being identified as "the angel of the bottomless pit" (Rev. 9:11), and defenders of royal privilege were equally upset by a note on Exodus 1:19 approving of the midwives' lying to Pharaoh. It was thus no great shock when England's new king, James I, commissioned a fresh translation in 1604.

When the new product first issued from the press seven years later, not all readers were favorably impressed. Some thought its English barbarous. Others criticized the translators' scholarship. Prominent churchmen, like the Hebraist Hugh Broughton, "had rather be rent in pieces by wild horses, than any such translation by my consent should be urged upon poor churches" (Bruce 1963, 229). However, the revision — for it was a revision of earlier versions — was well received by the authorities and therefore authorized, though never formally, to be read in the churches. But for two generations this Authorized Bible waged a struggle to replace the Geneva translation in popular usage. The Puritans brought this struggle to America, where the conceptions and arguments of the two factions in the famous "Antinomian Controversy" in Massachusetts (1637) were conditioned by the respective use of the two different Bibles (Stout 1982, 31).

Gradually, the phraseology of the Authorized Version came to be viewed as classically beautiful, and it wielded a major influence on English literature and the language itself. So completely did its turns of phrase eventually capture the popular mind that by the eighteenth century many Protestants felt it blasphemous to change it or even to point out the inadequacies of its scholarship (Daiches 1941). The subsequent efforts of Noah Webster and others to mend its defects had little effect on most antebellum Americans. Joseph Smith's generation was raised on the King James Version (as it came to be known in this country) as thoroughly as it was raised on food and water.

Yet while the familiar translation influenced virtually every aspect of his thought (Hutchinson 1988; Barlow 1988, chs. 1 and 2), Joseph Smith was in no sense bound to it as an "official" Bible. To the contrary, he regarded the version he inherited as malleable and open to creative prophetic adaptation. He believed the Bible was the word of God, but only "as far as it is translated correctly." And, he noted, the King James Version was not translated correctly in thousands of instances. The Prophet used the KJV as a baseline because it was generally available and known, but the thrust of his work was to break away from the confinement of set forms, to experiment with new verbal and theological constructions while pursuing his religious vision. Through good honest study, he worked to understand Hebrew and other tongues that would improve his scriptural perspective. While so doing, he experimented freely with Bibles in various languages, once observing that the German Bible (presumably Luther's) was the most correct of any (HC 6:363–64).

Neither did the KJV enjoy official status among the Saints as a whole. Early Mormons took the familiar version for granted in many ways, but they

routinely cited various translations of a given text, noting the King James rendition as but one among others (e.g., *Times and Seasons* 5:601 and 6:791). Orson Pratt stressed the textual limitations behind *any* version. For him, a translation from the original tongues was not really the word of God, and this specifically applied to the KJV (JD 7:26–27, 14:257a–60, 15:247–49, 16:218).

In fact, Church leaders such as Pratt, John Taylor, and George Albert Smith went out of their way to insist that the King James translators were not inspired (JD 1:25, 7:23ff, 12:264, 14:257–58, 17:269). Claiming no scholarly or prophetic basis for his view, Brigham Young casually guessed that, for all its errors, the Bible was probably translated about “as correctly as the scholars could get it.” Yet what he sought was accuracy and truth, not loyalty to a tradition: “If it be translated incorrectly, and there is a scholar on the earth who professes to be a Christian, and he can translate it any better than King James’s translators did it, he is under obligation to do so, or the curse is upon him” (JD 14:226–27). For a generation after Joseph Smith’s death, the KJV was thought of as the common, not the official, Bible of Mormonism.

ANTECEDENTS TO “OFFICIAL” STATUS

This began to change in 1867–68 when the newly formed Reorganized Church, which had access to the original manuscripts, published Joseph Smith’s inspired “translation” for the first time. Some Utah Mormons, like Orson Pratt, were enthusiastic about the Prophet’s revision, but Brigham Young was not (JD 1:56, 15:262–65; Bergera 1980, 39–40). Antagonism between the Utah Church and the smaller group in the Midwest who rejected his leadership led Brigham, and most of his colleagues, to suspect the new publication. Had Joseph’s original work been altered? Furthermore, they reasoned, the Prophet had not been able to finish and publish his revision during his lifetime. Some now suggested this failure was providential.

As copies began to proliferate in Utah, various leaders at the School of the Prophets in Provo voiced the Church’s stand against the new revision: “the world does not want this [new Bible] . . . they are satisfied with the King James translation”; “The King James translation is good enough. . . . I feel to support the old Bible until we can get a better one” (Durham 1965, 245–75). This sentiment was not universal in Utah, and it was explicitly provisional (“until we can get a better one”), but it was reiterated in later years¹ and marked the ironic beginning of a conscious stress on the King James Version.

An indirect but pervasive influence increasing the status of the KJV among the Saints was the general Protestant antipathy to Catholic immigrants. Antipathy had long flourished in Protestant lands, but Catholics were too few and too localized in eighteenth-century (eastern) America to incite broad conflict.

¹ In 1881, for example, future apostle Charles Penrose asserted that the Church would use the Authorized Version “until the inspired . . . revision commenced by the Prophet Joseph Smith shall have been completed, in a form acceptable to the Almighty and suitable for publication.” This suspicion of the “Reorganite” production was still apparent in the Utah-based church as recently as the early 1970s, after which it rapidly faded.

By the 1820s, however, Protestants were viewing Catholics, who before mid-century would constitute the nation's largest denomination, as a genuine threat to an evangelical America.

Mutual suspicion abounded, and many Protestants discerned conspiracy everywhere: Catholics' first allegiance was not to democracy and "the Bible alone" (a Protestant cliché), but to "Roman powers across the deep." Catholic "foreigners" simply did not belong — never mind that Maryland had been founded by Catholics and that Catholics had colonized the American shores for a century and a half before the Puritan migration. Large numbers of Catholics seemed to undermine American freedoms. Some evangelicals, like Lyman Beecher, believed Catholics were forbidden even to read the Bible "but by permission of the priesthood." Even then, they used their own foreign version instead of the "real Bible" of "real Christians" (Fogarty 1982, 164).

Quite apart from Beecher's misconceptions, Catholics *were* prohibited by the Council of Trent from reading the King James Version² In the 1840s, one New York priest outraged the nation's religious majority — and heightened their KJV sensibilities — by enforcing Trent's prohibition with excessive zeal: he collected and publicly burned the Bibles given his immigrant parishioners by one of the Protestant Bible societies. Even earlier, in the 1820s, the Catholic First Provincial Council had castigated the Protestant bias of public education — particularly the use of the King James Bible — and encouraged the founding of parochial schools. The issue did not fade for generations, and tensions often escalated to violence (Ahlstrom 1:666–81; Fogarty 1982, 163–65; Billington 1964, 68–76).

Thus, in restricted locales at first and across the land as the century wore on, the conscious use of the real, Christian, American, Protestant Bible — the King James Version — was increasingly momentous for many Americans. The KJV was still *almost* taken for granted, but to specifically mention it as one's own version often implied a declaration of one's Americanness and one's Christianity (which was to say, one had no Catholic sympathies).

To some extent, Latter-day Saints participated in this trend. Alienated from the culturally dominant Protestants in so many ways, the Saints plausibly might have identified with the embattled Catholics by defending alternative translations. But most LDS converts had come from Protestant ranks that assumed the KJV. Moreover, the Saints themselves had inherited a significant strain of anti-Catholicism, and during the course of Mormon history some would identify the Pope as the head of "the great and abominable church" mentioned in the Book of Mormon. An occasional Mormon leader even made these drifts explicit, remarking on the worth of the Authorized Version against Roman Catholics who objected to it (Cannon 1875, 246).

After the turn of the century, a more pressing influence — the newly perceived threat of modern biblical studies — helped entrench the Authorized Version. Although the responses of Church leaders to higher criticism were

² The Council of Trent banished from general use all translations not deriving from the Latin Vulgate; this naturally applied to the subsequent KJV. The prohibition was finally rescinded by Pope Pius XII in the 1943 encyclical *Divino Afflante Spiritu*.

actually quite diverse, many leaders were decidedly hostile, seeing the new approach to scripture as a menace to Christian faith. Some became defensive, viewing any attempt to progress beyond the trusted King James Bible *through scholarship* as a related challenge to faith. Joseph Fielding Smith, for instance, was so bitter at the inroads made by higher criticism that he viewed textual criticism equally dimly (1970, 364).

In addition to such causes, we must also acknowledge that Mormon loyalty to the KJV was simply the fruit of a diffuse conservatism, a natural attachment to the vehicle through which a people feel they have encountered the sacred. This love of the Bible "of one's youth" is easily traced in the resistance with which every major new translation, including the King James Version, has been greeted.³ This preservationist impulse will be explored more fully as we look at the later twentieth century, but it doubtless was a factor in earlier decades as well.

I must reiterate that this new emphasis on the Authorized Version in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries represented a real shift from Joseph Smith's era. But it is similarly important not to overstate the change. As many Saints had done since 1830, some continued simply to equate the Bible itself with its 1611 English translation; they had never known another. Indeed, although the KJV was spoken of with increasing self-consciousness as *the* Mormon Bible, considerable diversity continued to exist. B. H. Roberts and others were relatively open to ongoing studies that improved the Greek text from which better translations could be made (Roberts 1907-12, 31). A new generation of Latter-day Saint leaders continued to instruct that the KJV was not translated by inspiration (Penrose 1893, 544; Talmage 1899, 236-37; Clift 1904, 655, 663) and noted here and there other versions without asserting KJV superiority ("Translation" 1898).

Even when Church leaders did articulate reasons for recommending the King James over other translations, they rarely claimed that it was more accurate. They supported it primarily because they suspected the RLDS production of Joseph Smith's revision or because they believed the elegant familiar version had "taken too firm a hold of the popular heart" to forsake it (Penrose 1881; Smith and Roberts 1899, 621). Sometimes, in fact, they highly praised modern translations, offering only an appended tolerance for those who would

³ The 1611 translators were sensitive to the criticism of their work, which they properly foresaw. In the Preface to their translation, they pled their case in words that should give pause to those who so adamantly resist modern translations:

"We are so farre off from condemning any of their labours that traueiled before vs in this kinde, either in this land or beyond sea. . . . that we acknowledge them to have beene raised vp of God, . . . and that they deserue to be had of vs and of posteritie in everlasting remembrance. . . . Therefore blessed be they, and most honoured be their name, that breake the yce and give the onset vpon that which helpeth forward to the saving of soules. Now what can bee more auaileable thereto, than to deliuer Gods booke vnto Gods people in a tongue which they vnderstand? . . .

"So, if we building vpon their foundation that went before vs, and being holpen by their labours, doe endeavour to make that better which they left so good; no man, we are sure, hath cause to mislike vs; they, we perswade ourselues, if they were aliuie, would thanke vs.

"For is the kingdome of God become words or syllables? Why should wee be in bondage to them if we may be free. . . .?"

continue to prefer the familiar version “because they have grown accustomed to its lofty phrases” (Steele 1935, 6).

Occasionally, a leader even argued extensively for the superiority of the major revisions of 1881 and 1901 (the [British] Revised Version and the American Standard Version). One writer noted that the KJV scholars did not have access to older manuscripts subsequently available and that even the Catholic version was more accurate in many instances than the KJV. He went on to ridicule the common “beautiful literature” argument — as though scholars should take it upon themselves to add “grace and dignity” to the original language of the uneducated fishermen of Galilee. Although loyalty to the Bible of one’s ancestors was commendable, “those who accept the eighth article of the Church will seek for the best translation” (Clift 1904a, 654–64; 1904b, 774–78).

Despite this wide spectrum of attitudes, ordinary Church members during the first half of the century were not so much hostile as they were indifferent to the new translations that were beginning to multiply. Leaders increasingly noted that the KJV was the “best” version but often gave no rationale for the assertion (Smith 1954–56, 3:191; Widtsoe 1947, 257–60).⁴ The Church produced various editions for its missionaries, children’s organization, and education system — all using the KJV.

In the days of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young, then, Church leaders had largely taken the KJV for granted. But they had also insisted on its limitations and had encouraged the exploration, through both scholarly and prophetic means, of new and better expressions of God’s word. By contrast, leaders in the early twentieth century also took the KJV for granted but tended to resist scholarly improvements. They seemed passively to assume that if a new translation of the scriptures were needed, God would take the initiative and let his prophet know. Nineteenth-century Latter-day Saints shared much with their contemporaries but reacted creatively against a confining orthodoxy; early twentieth-century Saints shared much with their non-Mormon peers but reacted conservatively against a changing, secular world. Of course, Church members continued to feel free — sometimes they were even encouraged — to compare various translations. But we must wonder how many actually bothered.

J. REUBEN CLARK, JR.

The 1950s brought a significant change for readers of serious literature. The Revised Standard Version appeared and met the stiff resistance of J. Reuben Clark, dedicated and forceful member of the Church’s First Presidency. In the wake of President Clark’s still influential response, a substantial number of Saints for the first time moved beyond assuming the preeminence of the KJV, to believing they had scholarly and prophetic reasons for assuming it.

⁴ Elsewhere, Widtsoe did suggest that the language of the KJV was “unsurpassed,” that it had an excellent “spiritual connotation,” and, although he offered no basis for his guess, that it was probably superior in faithful adherence to the text available to its translators (1:100–101).

Brigham Young still had six years before him as an earthly prophet when J. Reuben Clark was born in the rural outpost of Grantsville, Utah, in 1871. Although his intellectual prospects were initially modest, Clark went on to an illustrious career in national public service. After graduating from the University of Utah as valedictorian, he attended the Columbia Law School, served as a principal editor of the *Columbia Law Review*, and graduated as one of the top students. Later, he became solicitor of the U.S. State Department, then U.S. undersecretary of state, and finally ambassador to Mexico. Throughout his public career, Clark's brilliance, integrity, and thoroughness earned high praise from senators, justices of the Supreme Court, and U.S. presidents. Indeed, he regularly declined the urging of men like Harry Chandler, owner of the *Los Angeles Times*, to run for president himself. In 1933 Clark resigned as Mexican ambassador to serve as a counselor to Church president Heber J. Grant. He continued in the First Presidency until his death in 1961, one of the longest periods of such service in LDS history (Yarn 1973; 1984; Fox 1980; Quinn 1983). One of the enduring legacies of his service resulted from his encounter with the scholarly revision of the text of the English Bible.

The complete Revised Standard Version was launched in 1952 with a publicity campaign such as few, if any, of its predecessors had enjoyed. That, of course, did not protect it from adverse criticism. Some thought the translation was unnecessarily conservative and did not deviate sufficiently from the KJV. A more vocal group believed it not only deviated excessively but was itself devious — scarcely Christian. The project had been sponsored by the liberal National Council of Churches, and this alone was enough to insure the mistrust of many evangelicals and the undisguised contempt of their fundamentalist cousins. Pamphlets bearing titles like *The New Blasphemous Bible* and *The Bible of Antichrist* are as indicative of the virulent response as the fact that Senator Joseph McCarthy's Senate investigation committee formally charged members of the RSV translating committee with allowing Communist influences to subvert the Bible (Bruce 1970, 194–209; Noll 1984, 109–10).

Mormon responses were more reserved, though some did use the occasion to affirm the stature of the KJV. An unsigned editorial in the October 1952 *Church News* asserted: "For the Latter-day Saints there can be but one version of the Bible" — the King James Version (p. 16). One year later, Apostle Mark E. Petersen echoed that the Bible "officially used in the Church" was the KJV (1953, 17–21). J. Reuben Clark clearly was not the only Latter-day Saint who disliked the new Bible; he was merely the most articulate.⁵

President Clark rebelled for much of his adult life against "the pettifogging, doubt-raising attacks" of the higher critics, and he was equally disdainful of the new "lower" or textual critics. His passionate objections to the revisions of 1888 and 1901 launched him on a decades-long course of meticulous research in defense of the KJV. Over the years, he expressed his views in personal correspondence, in private conversations, and in public sermons. Upon the appearance of the RSV — which, in the wake of earlier revisions, he con-

⁵ Leaders like Mark E. Petersen did, however, use other versions when they seemed helpful.

sidered “more of the same, only worse” — Clark spent several additional years preparing his research notes for publication. The result was his monumental 1956 tome, *Why the King James Version*.⁶

In the book, President Clark presented his case with a lawyer’s skill and a churchman’s zeal. His arguments were interwoven and reiterated throughout his work, but for purposes of analysis they may be separated into six categories. Most of these he shared with KJV apologists of various denominations. Some, however, were distinctive to the Latter-day Saints, and these were perhaps the reason why the issue of the KJV’s status did not rise even to the level of serious debate in Mormon ranks. Compared to the three revisions (1888, 1901, and 1952), President Clark believed the Authorized Version was (1) doctrinally more acceptable, (2) verified by the work of Joseph Smith, (3) based on a better Greek text, (4) literarily superior, (5) the version of LDS tradition, and (6) produced by prayerful souls subject to the Holy Spirit, rather than by a mixture of believing and unbelieving, or orthodox and heterodox, scholars.⁷

Easily the most important of these arguments — the one that controlled and motivated his entire KJV apology — was Clark’s belief that the revisions were infected with a despicable, conspiratorial humanism. “As one notes . . . the havoc which [the revisions] work upon vital portions of the Scriptures as contained in the Authorized Version, . . . one can but wonder if there be not behind this movement . . . a deliberate . . . intent to destroy the Christian faith.” Adding a self-revealing metaphor, he proclaimed the King James Bible the “citadel of Christianity” (1956, 6–7, 27, 34, 121, 126, 356).

In particular, President Clark was bothered that the revised versions cast doubt on cherished phrases by offering alternative readings, supported by ancient texts, in the margin.⁸ He was yet more offended that other treasured sayings were actually removed from the text and given only marginal status.⁹

⁶ On the title page, Clark justly described his work as, “A series of study notes, neither treatises nor essays, dealing with certain elementary problems and specific scriptural passages, involved in considering the preferential English translations of the Greek New Testament text.”

⁷ Clark cast additional aspersions against modern versions, but he failed to develop them into arguments. For example, he accused the RSV scholars of “interpreting” rather than “translating.” This seems a fundamental misunderstanding, however, since all translation necessarily entails interpretation and since, in any case, the KJV scholars, with their predominant concern for literary excellence, could more easily have been accused of over-translating than could the RSV scholars. Similarly, the preface and conclusion to Clark’s book emphasized that God is greater than humans, who ought not attempt to mar God’s word. But the RSV translators as a group would have concurred.

⁸ The revisions of Luke 23:34, for instance, read essentially the same as the KJV, but add a marginal note: “Some ancient authorities omit *And Jesus said, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.*” Other examples troubling Clark were Matthew 17:21; Matthew 18:11; and the famous “long ending” of the Gospel of Mark (16:9–20).

⁹ For example, the revisions reduced to marginal status the doxology (“For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory”) from the Lord’s prayer in Matthew 6:13. Other prominent instances include Luke 2:14; 22:19–20; 22:43–44; 23:44. Clark seemed more concerned about the possibility of losing something from the scriptures than he was about canonizing words that may have been later additions. But the KJV also omits various clarifying words and phrases included in virtually all recent critical editions of the Greek New Testament. For examples, see Larson 1978, 125–32.

Equally distressing, familiar KJV words were replaced by new translations: “charity” in I Corinthians 13 became “love”; “lunatic” (Matt. 17:14) became “epileptic.” But what disturbed Clark most deeply was the tendency he thought he saw to reduce the divine status of Jesus and the supernatural dimension of scripture in general. “Miracles” were now called “signs,” “wonders,” or “mighty works.” Textual doubt over the phrase “the Son of God” was noted in revisions of Mark 1:1. Marginal alternate readings were documented for Christ as “God over all” in Romans 9:4–5. Like opponents of the revisions nationally and internationally, Clark followed conservative scholars (especially John W. Burgon and F. H. A. Scrivener) in citing example after example where modern translations scandalized traditional tastes (1956, 318, 398; Carson 1979, 43).

President Clark’s reasoning, however, contained two major flaws. The *least* that could be said of the revisers’ changes was that plausible scholarly reasons existed for making them.¹⁰ And if the best evidence suggested that certain passages in the KJV were not in the originals but were interpolated by later copyists, it was hardly becoming to insist that they be retained simply because they were treasured traditions or because they reinforced Latter-day Saint perceptions. Joseph Smith, the Book of Mormon, and the Bible itself had all condemned such tampering.

Moreover, even if one allowed theological perspectives to consciously take precedence over textual and translation accuracy, there are passages where modern translations, including those Clark attacked, directly ascribe deity to Jesus when the King James Version does not (Appendix). It is thus scarcely just to accuse the modern translators of systematic theological bias exceeding the inevitable bias of any translation, including the KJV. The central point, however, is that even for a people like the Latter-day Saints, who believe in current revelation, translations of scripture accomplished by human scholarship must be based on what the best texts actually say, not on what a preexisting theology or tradition wants them to say.

President Clark was aware of this, of course. He therefore marshaled evidence, both prophetic and scholarly, to back up his doctrinal concerns. Unfortunately, he drew his prophetic support from a fundamental misperception of Joseph Smith’s revelations. Specifically, Clark felt the Prophet’s inspired revision of the Bible supported the King James Version in all essential matters. Whenever one compared the Prophet’s “translation” with objectionable changes in the RV/ASV/RSV, Joseph’s Bible more closely resembled the KJV — thus demonstrating the errors of the modern revisions (Clark 1956, 3, 43, 318, 398).

¹⁰ Where the KJV and the revisions differ in English but depend on identical Greek texts, we may defend scholarly logic on both sides. Paul’s *agape* in I Corinthians 13, for example, does not mean “charity” (KJV) but “love” (RSV). Yet the English word “love” is inadequate also, since Greek distinguishes several kinds of love with different words. The King James scholars apparently tried to convey a meaning that would give particular shape to our general concept of love. There remain dozens of readings where KJV phraseology is arguably preferable to the RSV. For several examples in a single chapter, see Grant’s exegesis of Mark 1:14, 16, 44 (1951). But weighing against such examples are thousands of instances where the RSV is clearly superior.

This line of thought was reinforced by President Clark's understanding of revelation in general. For all his erudition in other matters, he seems to have had little apprehension of the conceptual nature of Joseph Smith's revelations. Instead, Clark thought of them as almost verbally exact expressions recorded by the Prophet precisely as they fell from the mouth of God. President Clark believed the Doctrine and Covenants, for example, preserved "the words of the Lord as He [actually] spoke them" (Durham 1971, 36-37). Similarly, for Clark, Joseph Smith's changes in the KJV indicated the original form of the ancient texts.

There was irony in the fact that Joseph Smith's inspired translation, as published by the RLDS Church, was now being used to authenticate the KJV text. After all, it had been Mormon *suspensions* about this publication that had, in the 1860s, sponsored the initial elevation of the KJV's stature among the Saints. But more than irony was involved here. Clark's logic actually inverted reality. Joseph Smith's biblical revision resembled the King James Version because that is the version he worked from and amended, not because God's native tongue was Late Middle or Early Modern English. For similar reasons, Joseph's other revelations also retained a measure of the language of King James (Barlow 1988, chs. 1 and 2). However, the Prophet himself could scarcely have considered all his revelations to be the exact words of God, which he then recorded as if by dictation, for he frequently, publicly, and unapologetically rearranged, reworded, conflated, and augmented them (Howard 1969).

President Clark was by no means the first, it should be noted, to use this reasoning. Because Joseph Smith had couched his revelations as though God were speaking in the "first person" in a nineteenth-century dialect of Jacobean English, the earliest Mormons, who were as immersed in biblical phraseology as Joseph was himself, doubtless assumed this was God's manner of speech when he addressed Americans. A century later, however, the language of the KJV was less taken for granted by believing Christians. Alternative translations in modern language, not merely revisions of the KJV, were rapidly appearing (Hills 1961). Remaining allegiance to Elizabethan and Jacobean forms became more conscious. Thus, in celebrating the 300th anniversary of the KJV, a 21 April 1911 column in the Church-owned *Deseret Evening News* marveled, even more innocently than did J. Reuben Clark, that King James's "is the version given to the world by eminent scholarship in the very same language in which modern revelations are given."

IN SEARCH OF SCHOLARLY SUPPORT

President Clark's misapprehension of the nature of Joseph Smith's revelations was unfortunate. Yet it was not on this but on scholarly grounds that he made his most elaborate case for the authorized text. He was modest and honest enough to preface his academic argument with the disclaimer that he was not a genuine biblical scholar. As he acknowledged, he knew no biblical language, had no formal training, and based his assessment entirely on secondary materials.

His use of these secondary sources was, however, prodigious. If his major concern with the revised Bibles was that they were laced with a modern humanism, his undergirding contention was that an *ancient* humanism — the heresy of Arianism¹¹ — tainted the Greek text upon which the revisions rested. In order to legitimate the doctrinally more acceptable King James Bible, President Clark championed the “*Textus Receptus*” (TR), the Byzantine-based Greek text from which the KJV had been translated. Those scholars who similarly supported the Byzantine text, Clark called “Sound” or “High” Textualists; those who did not, he pejoratively labeled “Extreme Textualists.”

The details of modern textual criticism are complex and available elsewhere (Metzger 1969; Carson 1979; Moulton 1967; Brown 1968). But to understand Clark’s academic reasoning, a brief account of the development of the New Testament texts behind the KJV and the revised versions is necessary.

Erasmus published the first Greek New Testament in 1516. His edition was based on only six manuscripts, dating from the eleventh to the fifteenth centuries, and these in turn came essentially from a single tradition which, anciently, had several rivals. Thus, by modern standards, his edition was inadequate. In fact, for small parts of the New Testament where he lacked any Greek manuscripts, Erasmus simply translated the Latin Vulgate into what he conjectured the original might have been! One intriguing result is that there are no Greek manuscripts at all behind a dozen or so readings in the KJV.

Thirty years later, Robert Estienne (Stephanus) produced Greek editions following Erasmus in the text but using several additional manuscripts and introducing a critical apparatus to show alternate readings in the margins. His text was thus only a minimal improvement over Erasmus’s. Theodore Beza enriched this tradition somewhat by publishing nine editions of the Greek New Testament between 1565 and 1604. Two of these influenced the King James translators. The resultant text became the *Textus Receptus*.¹²

It is unfortunate that so influential a version as the King James was based on the TR, a text incorporating relatively few, relatively late, and relatively poor manuscripts. Not only had Beza and his predecessors ignored several earlier manuscripts than those they used, but for three centuries after 1611, additional manuscripts more ancient than those used by the King James scholars became available. A far more important development was the gradual recognition by scholars after 1725 that there were manuscript *traditions* or “families” — not merely numerous manuscripts — that differed from the TR. This insight led to continual improvement of textual classifications and allowed

¹¹ The fourth-century Arian controversy was waged on sophisticated, highly nuanced metaphysical and ontological ground. As used by J. Reuben Clark, Arianism meant essentially that the humanity of Jesus was emphasized and his divinity minimized or lost.

¹² J. Reuben Clark imbued this title with great dignity, but the term actually originated from what textual expert Bruce Metzger calls “an advertising blurb.” Thirteen years after the publication of the KJV, two brothers published a compact Greek New Testament, the text of which was essentially Beza’s. The “blurb” reads: “*Textum ergo habes, nunc ab omnibus receptum: in quo nihil immutatum aut corruptum damus*” (“The text that you have is now received by all, in which we give nothing changed or perverted”); hence, “Textus Receptus” (Carson 1979, 36).

“lower” criticism to proceed on a more scientific basis, reaching a peak with the landmark work of Cambridge scholars B. F. Westcott and F. J. A. Hort, who in 1881–82 published *The New Testament in the Original Greek*.

Hort and Westcott positioned four major “families” of ancient texts. Of these, they said, the “Syrian,” represented by the Byzantine tradition, was the latest and most corrupt. The least corrupt, or “neutral” tradition, was the “Alexandrian.” This represented a direct challenge to the Byzantine-based King James Bible. The theory was bitterly attacked but won the support of most scholars and underlies virtually all subsequent work in New Testament criticism. As Raymond Brown observes, if the King James was a translation of the *Textus Receptus*, the RV and the subsequent RSV were heavily influenced by principles akin to those of the Westcott-Hort Greek Testament (1968).

Because he believed that the revised versions undermined cherished Christian ideals, J. Reuben Clark turned the guns of his formidable mind against the Westcott-Hort text (1956, 67–118).¹³ He followed critics who protested that the Westcott-Hort construction was overly dependent on the Alexandrian text-type, particularly the famous codices (manuscript volumes), Sinaiticus and Vaticanus. He further followed those who alleged that these codices were not only fourth-century (that is, late) manuscripts, but that they represented a text-type that only *originated* in the fourth century, under heretical conditions, which is why the early church rejected them.

Most serious scholars were unpersuaded by such theories,¹⁴ and subsequent discoveries have demonstrated that the Alexandrian text-type goes back at least to the second century. Westcott and Hort definitely established that certain traditions were generally preferable to others, and it remains true that the Alexandrian type has the best credentials. The able textual studies of even arch-conservative Protestants like Benjamin B. Warfield and J. Gresham Machen argue that the Byzantine text-type is essentially a late one (Carson 1979, 43).

But some of President Clark’s contentions have merit. The Westcott-Hort theory has, in the twentieth century, been modified in many respects. Among other things, the textual traditions identified by the theory have been reclassified. Modern scholars recognize, unlike Westcott-Hort, that no text group has descended essentially uncontaminated from the original autographs. Also,

¹³ It should be noted that the *Textus Receptus* and the Byzantine text-type are not synonymous. The TR is based on a mere handful of relatively late manuscripts, compared to the thousands in the Byzantine tradition. The closest manuscripts within the Byzantine or any other textual tradition average six to ten variants per chapter. Thus even a successful defense of the superiority of the Byzantine tradition (which most scholars reject) would not constitute a successful defense of the King James Bible, which is a translation of the TR (Carson 1979, 37, 67–68).

¹⁴ A small minority of scholars, including the fine thinker Richard L. Anderson from BYU, marshal at least plausible reasons for the superiority of the *Textus Receptus*. In my view, however, many such defenses by Latter-day Saints — though here I mention no scholar in particular — are motivated as much by, “This is the Church’s position; I must find an intellectual way to defend it,” as by a more objective attempt to determine the best Greek text. Moreover, as this essay insists, the Church’s current stance toward the KJV has evolved from a significantly different one.

while the Byzantine text is not generally preferable to the Alexandrian, some of the Byzantine readings (as with all the major traditions) are genuinely ancient. Westcott and Hort had indeed, as Clark charged, been overly dependent on the Vaticanus and Sinaiticus codices. However, President Clark failed to allow that modern critical editions are eclectic, established on a case-by-case basis, using the best available evidence. They do not slavishly depend on the Alexandrian or any other tradition.¹⁵

But President Clark went further in his criticism. Because modifications in the critical text were ongoing and scholars admitted they were likely to continue indefinitely, Clark implied that we therefore need not take too seriously changes that went beyond the TR (and thus beyond the KJV) (1956, 358).¹⁶ This perspective, however, did not give sufficient weight to the tentative nature of all progress in human knowledge.

In any event, the case for the RSV was never based solely on the existence of better manuscripts than those available to King James's translators. The discovery of a wealth of papyri in the twentieth century has significantly deepened scholars' understanding of the New Testament language as a whole, making better translations inevitable. Linguistic progress has been even more dramatic in the case of the Old Testament.

Perhaps the most enduring argument marshaled for the King James Bible against its challengers has been its unmatched literary elegance. As we have noted, this was not self-evident when the work first appeared in 1611. But within fifty years of its publication its excellence was increasingly acknowledged; feelings of reverence became ever more deeply attached to this beauty.

During most of the nineteenth century, Latter-day Saints said little about the Bible's literary value, much less that this criterion should take priority over accuracy. Their oft-repeated refrain was that all texts and translations were corrupt, and they professed to care most about precision, not beauty. However, with the arrival of the Joseph Smith revision and the threatening appearance of major new revisions, the literary importance of the KJV was increasingly stressed.

For J. Reuben Clark, this was an important issue. "Could any language be too great, too elegant, too beautiful, too majestic, too divine-like to record the doings and sayings of Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ?" he said. The language of God was ill-served when rendered "on the level of the ordinary press reporter's style of today" (1956, 355, 377).

¹⁵ Richard Anderson feels that the so-called eclectic texts pay only lip service to eclecticism and remain overly dependent on Sinaiticus and Vaticanus.

¹⁶ The provisional nature of textual criticism may be illustrated by the return to the text, in the second edition of the RSV, of a few passages formerly moved to the margin. Clark would have felt vindicated, for example, by the return of the account of the woman caught in adultery (John 7:53-8:11). But the essential point is that, rather than allow scholarship to weigh its evidence unencumbered, Clark would have refused, on grounds of familiarity or doctrine, to excise or even to annotate the passage in the first place. It was just this sort of thought that had forced Erasmus, against his judgment and against virtually all manuscript evidence, to include the text of 1 John 5:7, the classic proof-text for the Trinity, in his Greek New Testament. Consequently, the spurious passage remains in the KJV to this day (Carson 1979, 34-35).

This concern for literary beauty had practical consequences. Before publishing *Why the King James Version*, Clark approached Church president David O. McKay for permission. McKay resisted. "We ought to be a little careful," he said, "about criticizing the Revised Version," since in some places it proved more accurate than the familiar text and it also eliminated confusing, outdated terms. Clark countered that President McKay, who had literary training, would probably not wish to rewrite Shakespeare's plays for the same purpose. The Church president acknowledged the point and assented to Clark's publication of the book (Quinn 1983, 177).

President Clark's belief in the decisive importance of the linguistic superiority of the KJV was a plausible perspective, certainly. The KJV is a literary masterpiece and has perhaps more power in certain instances to awaken religious feelings than more pedestrian translations. But this belief could hardly pass as the official Church view when the prophet and president of the Church remained unenthusiastic. And President Clark's quip about Shakespeare would apply only if one's central purpose in reading scripture were literary. But for Latter-day Saints the Bible served other purposes. And unlike Shakespeare, the Testaments were not original products of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England. Translating the Bible afresh was not analogous to marring the original Shakespeare but to offering a new translation of Shakespeare to, say, German-speaking peoples, when Germans already possess a beautiful but inaccurate rendition they hold dear.

The literary argument had other weaknesses. President McKay pointed out the most obvious ones: an archaic style and terms that were sometimes charming but markedly difficult for most modern readers to understand. Clark allowed the problem but insisted that the Authorized Version could be understood in all essential parts by the careful, thoughtful reader. A little work with a reference book, he felt, could overcome this small obstacle.

Perhaps President Clark's own diligence led him to overestimate the ambitions of the ordinary reader. Even so, his own experience undermined his position. Difficult Jacobean words and phrases might here and there be overcome by the few who would bother to consult reference material,¹⁷ or when readers encountered familiar material such as the Sermon on the Mount. But such measures would hardly suffice for those attempting to understand, say, the intricate and sustained arguments of the Epistle to the Romans. President Clark himself admitted he did not grasp much of Paul, which is no wonder (Clark 1956, 60; Quinn 1983, 162). The famous apostle is difficult enough to read for any length of time in the original Greek; for the average reader, the challenge is yet more severe in archaic English. For the Church's young members, attempting to view the overall message of Paul or Isaiah or Hebrews through the dense lens of Elizabethan prose is very nearly hopeless.

Other facts further diluted the "beautiful literature" argument. In presenting ancient documents to a modern world, modern translators had, in many passages, been faced with either retaining the elegance of the KJV or offering

¹⁷ Or, in contemporary Mormonism, the larger number who consult the footnotes of their current LDS edition.

a modern accurate rendition. To choose elegance over accuracy ran explicitly counter to the calls of Brigham Young and others for exactness in translation. It also ran implicitly against a more general dislike of elaborate religious display: Latter-day Saints and Protestants alike had long disparaged what they saw as the gorgeous robes, overly ornate cathedrals, ostentatious public ceremonies, and other trappings of Catholicism.¹⁸ Yet for Mormons to insist on retaining a beautiful language no longer accessible to the common person differed only in degree from contemporaneous American Catholics who insisted on a beautiful and mysterious Latin Mass.

Earlier in the century, Latter-day Saints had already expressed reserve toward the tendency of scholars to inflate the humble dialects of many of the original biblical writings into a "masterly English." Twentieth-century scholars made a similar point, demonstrating what the scholars of the RV and ASV, to say nothing of the KJV, did not know, namely that the New Testament had been written in *Koine* or "common" Greek. As one eminent authority has put it, "an elaborate, elegant style is unsuited to" biblical translation, "and in proportion as it is rendered in a conscious literary style, it is misrepresented to the modern reader."¹⁹

Beyond the literary argument, an even weaker claim for the authorized translation was President Clark's assertion that it was the Bible of Mormon tradition, one that had successfully guided the Church from its beginning. This was technically true, of course, but, as already suggested, Joseph Smith would have been the last person to make allegiance to an inaccurate Bible an official practice when he knew of an alternative. His use of the KJV was incidental to the time and location of his birth and, even then, he refused to be confined by it. The Book of Mormon itself scoffed at tradition-bound souls who refused progress in hearing the word of God.

President Clark reinforced his "argument by tradition" by noting that "the great bulk of our people know and use only the Authorized Version, and do not have access either to the Revised Versions . . . or to other versions." Moreover, he said, "references in our Standard Church Works and our Church literature are to the Authorized Version," and Bible commentaries and dictionaries are in good part keyed to it. In a comment perhaps more revealing

¹⁸ President Clark himself worried that the Church risked duplicating what Mormons believed was the early apostasy of Christianity, warning against such practices as specified dress in Church administration and pageantry in Church ceremonies (CR 1945, 166; Quinn 1983, 173).

¹⁹ Edgar J. Goodspeed (in Clark 1956, 355). The Church's First Presidency has shown sensitivity to the potential problems of translations that attempt to improve upon ambiguities or literary infelicities of the scriptural text being translated. In 1980, for example, when giving instructions for a new translation of the Book of Mormon and other Latter-day Saint scriptures into German, the First Presidency observed: "The translation must contain the recurring expressions and also awkward sentence constructions. No attempt may be made to paraphrase in an explanatory way, to make alterations, or indeed to improve the literary ability and knowledge as expressed in the current English text versions" (Snow 1984, 136). Such a statement reflects the deep reverence felt toward Mormon scriptures but, in light of the Church position on the KJV, it reveals no awareness of the ways in which the Authorized Version of the Bible has been guilty of improving upon the original Hebrew and Greek manuscripts.

than he knew, Clark added that the "Authorized Version is to most of us *The Bible*, and we would feel we had been disloyal to the record of God's dealings with men if we were to use any other text (we love the Word of God as therein given)" (1956, 60–61).

The sentiment was appropriately reverent, but the logic was not cogent. And what little force the point then held is rapidly evaporating. Gaining familiarity with other versions and access to them were scarcely insurmountable problems even in President Clark's time. And what was then a minor difficulty was only compounded by his making the KJV seem more official to ordinary believers. Commentaries and dictionaries by the most competent scholars are, of course, no longer "keyed" primarily to the KJV.

In a subset of the tradition argument, President Clark made much of the fact that the RV and ASV had not displaced the King James Version in popularity (Yarn 1984, 78–79, 92). He was sure that the RSV would fare no better. There was substance to this claim, since the KJV had, in fact, retained an entrenched loyalty. But this became less and less true as time went on. Recent translations like the New English Bible, Today's English Bible, the New International Version, the RSV itself, and a number of others have continued to gain an increasing share of the market. And even if the weight of President Clark's assertion had endured, to insist on a Bible that is more popular than accurate remains a problematic posture.

Clark's final defense of the Authorized Version (or final assault on the revised translations) arose from his doctrinal concerns. In this defense, President Clark implied that the King James translators had been inspired, while the Revised Standard Version scholars had not: no "clear cut statement of the Revisers is noted that . . . they either sought or enjoyed the help of the Spirit of the Lord. . . . It would seem the whole Revision was approached in the same spirit they would employ in the translation of any classical work." Against this President Clark contrasted the KJV translators' work as described in their preface:

And in what sort did these assemble? In the trust of their own knowledge, or of their sharpness of wit, or deepness of judgment, as it were in an arm of flesh? At no hand. They trusted in him that hath the key of *David* . . . ; they prayed to the Lord . . . to the effect that St. *Augustine* did; *O let thy Scriptures be my pure delight; let me not be deceived in them, neither let me deceive by them.* In this confidence, and with this devotion, did they assemble together.

Thus, Clark implied, the KJV scholars — and not the Revised scholars — were "amenable to the promptings of the Holy Spirit" (1956, xxvii, 4–5, 274–86, 355–56, 418–19).

This position was a bit awkward. First, the newly implied claim that the KJV translators were inspired was directly opposed to the almost unanimous contention of Church leaders from 1830 to President Clark's own time. Second, we might argue that including "non-believing" translators on the Revisers' committee helped minimize sectarian bias in the finished product. Third, whatever the advantages or disadvantages of secularity, the Revised translators did, in fact, invoke the hand of God over their work. In an essay so pious that it

would have embarrassed the self-respecting modern translators of any work but holy scripture, the British Revision concluded its preface thus:

We now conclude, humbly commending our labours to Almighty God, and praying that his favour and blessing may be vouchsafed to that which has been done in his name. We recognised from the first the responsibility of the undertaking; and through our manifold experience of its abounding difficulties we have felt more and more, as we went onward, that such a work can never be accomplished by organised efforts of scholarship and criticism, unless assisted by Divine help.

Thus, in the review of the work which we have been permitted to complete, our closing words must be words of mingled thanksgiving, humility, and prayer. Of thanksgiving, for the many blessings vouchsafed to us throughout . . . our corporate labours; of humility, for our failings and imperfections in the fulfillment of our task; and of prayer to Almighty God, that the Gospel of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ may be more clearly and more freshly shown forth to all who shall be readers of this Book.

The preface to editions of the later RSV went on to say:

The Bible is more than a historical document to be preserved. And it is more than a classic of English literature to be cherished and admired. It is a record of God's dealing with men, of God's revelation of Himself and His will. It records the life and work of Him in whom the word of God became flesh and dwelt among men. [The] Word must not be disguised in phrases that are no longer clear, or hidden under words that have changed or lost their meaning.

J. Reuben Clark found such professions weak, reserved for the end of the respective prefaces of which they were a part, and more remarkable for what they did not say than for what they did. Their authors, he seemed to feel, damned themselves with faint praise of God.

Now we must readily acknowledge that the Revisers were more restrained in their overt piety than their KJV predecessors, whose eloquent preface continued at great length. But President Clark made no allowance for the difference between modern tastes and those of an age of rhetorical flourish. He seemed to take the worshipful KJV preface at face value, as though it could with little change be transferred to the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. That such a wholesale transfer would have been inapt may be seen by a glance at what modern standards would judge as the obsequious, almost idolatrous 1611 dedication to the increasingly unpopular and autocratic King James.²⁰

So distressing was James's behavior to the Puritans that his reign became but a preface to that of Charles I, whose more extreme actions prompted the great Puritan exodus to New England, then British civil war, and finally his own execution. Despite such tensions, the age of literary extravagance induced the Puritans, who were well represented among the Authorized translators, to support "The Epistle Dedicatory" to King James: "Great and manifold were the blessings, most dread Sovereign, which Almighty God, the Father of all mercies, bestowed upon us the people of England, when first he sent Your Majesty's Royal Person to rule and reign over us." The appearance of "Your Majesty" was "as of the *Sun* in his strength, instantly [dispelling] mists . . . accompanied with peace and tranquillity at home and abroad." "Your very

²⁰ For James's increasing difficulties with his subjects, see Ahlstrom 1:134-35.

name is precious" and Your subjects look to You "as that sanctified Person, who, under God, is the immediate Author of their true happiness." Similar effusion was not absent from the Authorized "Translators to the Reader"; J. Reuben Clark was expecting too much if he thought its grandiloquence should be duplicated by modern scholars.

REPERCUSSIONS

Under careful scrutiny, then, J. Reuben Clark's justifications of the King James Bible do not fare well. While the various points of excellence of the Authorized Version ought not be treated lightly, to insist on it as an official version guarantees significant misunderstanding (or non-understanding) by ordinary Saints. Moreover, although Clark held his views passionately, he was literally the first to admit his opinions were personal. The initial words of *Why the King James Version* were: "For this book I alone am responsible. It is not a Church publication."

Yet President Clark held an exceedingly prominent position in Mormonism. Despite his own disavowal, there were inevitably many who believed his words represented God's opinion on the issues, especially since some other Church officials actively supported his views. In addition, President Clark was unusually erudite. Because of his forcefulness, making it seem that to abandon the King James translation in favor of another was to abandon one's faith, and perhaps also because no one of influence and competence publicly presented an alternative view, his book galvanized conservative impulses among the Saints and quickly acquired a quasi-official aura. Virtually all subsequent apologies for the Authorized Bible depended primarily on President Clark or used similar arguments less ably than he (Petersen 1966, 16, 24–25, 44, 52; 9 Sept. 1972, 16; McConkie 1966, 421–23; 1970–74, 1:59–63; 1984; Gonzalez 1987, 23–25; *Life and Teachings* 1978; "Bible Versions" 1952; "Why" 1956; Sperry 1961, 498–99, 546–50; "Which Bible" 1970).

On rare occasions, leaders have offered reasons for continued KJV usage that Clark did not call upon. Joseph Fielding Smith, for example, suggested the Authorized Version was retained because it was accepted by most Protestants, providing "common ground for proselyting purposes" (1957–66, 2:207). President Smith's assertion was perfectly true in the 1950s when he wrote and therefore, quite apart from Clark's reasoning, the KJV was a logical choice for the Saints if proselyting, rather than scriptural understanding or scriptural accuracy, was the controlling criterion. However, even if we were to accept this rationale, it becomes less true with each passing year. By 1979, when the Church produced its new edition of the Authorized Bible, only 34.8 percent of American homes used the KJV as their primary Bible.²¹ This

²¹ Elwell 1979, 48. RSV sales averaged one million copies a year during its first decade and had risen to total fifty million copies in print by 1981. The RSV has been adapted for use by Catholics, who also produced the superbly annotated Jerusalem Bible (1966) and, as their main version in this country, the New American Bible (1970). By 1981, American sales of the paraphrased Living Bible stood at twenty-five million; the New American Standard Bible (a conservative revision of the Authorized Version) at fourteen million; both the Good News Bible (Today's English Version) and the New English Bible at twelve million

is actually an impressive figure and proves that the KJV is still the popular choice among U.S. Protestants. But its dominance is waning; it no longer represents "the majority of Protestants." And what of the country's fifty million Catholics?

In recent years, LDS religious educators have not usually borrowed the slightly more developed defenses offered contemporarily by the few fundamentalist scholars who continue to push the *Textus Receptus*. Instead, they have tended to cite J. Reuben Clark or use his logic and to augment his uniquely Mormon argument that Joseph Smith's modern revelations verify the accuracy of the KJV.

One teacher compares many passages where he feels modern translations obscure "doctrines of the Restoration," whereas KJV language "triggers" them. For instance, the "dispensation of the fulness of times" (Eph. 1:10) has a very specific Restorationist meaning for most Latter-day Saints. Therefore, translating the Greek phrase behind it as "when the time is right" or "when the time fully comes," as some scholars do, mars a proof-text for a popular Mormon concept and abandons "unique terminology seemingly preferred by God."²² This approach, like President Clark's, ignores the fact that all sorts of popular illusions are based precisely on this process, which allows — *forces* — theology to depend on incidental KJV phraseology rather than on the genuine intent of the original authors or on some other basis.²³ As a result (to stay with the same example), the KJV translation of Ephesians 1:10 helps confine Mormon thought to an early nineteenth-century dispensational mindset popularized by John Nelson Darby of the Plymouth Brethren.²⁴

Another LDS writer uses Joseph Smith's modern revelations to verify the accuracy of the KJV from a slightly different angle. He notes that the Prophet translated the Book of Mormon and recorded his own revelations in the idiom of the KJV. The writer goes on to suggest that this style must be preferred by

each; and the New International Version at three million (a figure that has since grown dramatically as more evangelicals have adopted it). The New King James Bible, a significant improvement over the KJV, was issued in 1979, just as the new LDS edition came out. For recent figures, see Ostling 1981, 62–63.

²² Gonzalez n.d. The notion that the language is "seemingly preferred by God" arises because KJV language is echoed throughout the Doctrine and Covenants and Book of Mormon — an idea treated fully in Barlow 1988, chapters one and two. Other examples Gonzalez cites where LDS notions are cemented to the particular phraseology of the KJV include the idea of a pre-existent "first estate" (KJV Jude 6; Abraham 3:26, 28) rather than a "proper domain" (New King James Version); the "veil" of the temple (KJV Mark 15:38; D&C 110:1) rather than the "curtain" (RSV); and "We have . . . a more sure word of prophecy" (KJV 2 Peter 1:19; D&C 131:5) rather than "confirms for us the message of the prophets" (New English Bible).

²³ Anthony Hutchinson (1988) has recently shown how profoundly misleading this approach has been in the very formation of scripture.

²⁴ Ahlstrom 2:277–79. Although the idea of successive divine dispensations began well before the time of Jesus, the modern form of "premillennial dispensationalism" is usually tied by scholars to Darby. My own impression is that the idea was too diffuse in Darby's time to be traced so neatly to him as its "effective originator." In any case, "dispensation" has a number of rich meanings, as a look at a dictionary will suggest; one can have faith in Joseph Smith's prophetic calling without dividing human history neatly into prepackaged epochs in quite the way many Mormons and fundamentalist Christians do.

God, since Smith's successor prophets have continued to record revelations in the same idiom. He cites as "obvious illustrations" Doctrine and Covenants 135, 136, and 138 by John Taylor, Brigham Young, and Joseph F. Smith respectively. Because of this continued use of KJV language, he writes, the clear "intent is that [all scripture] be woven together as one book" (J. McConkie 1987, 126).

This line of thought gives little weight to the probability that Joseph Smith cast his revelations in KJV idiom because, raised on the KJV, he (unconsciously?) equated it with religious terminology. But he did the same thing with early accounts of his first vision, yet greatly lessened the tendency in later accounts (particularly the one now canonized), as his confidence in his prophetic calling grew (Barlow 1988, Ch. 1). And Brigham Young, who thought his sermons "as good scripture as . . . this Bible," did not preach in KJV idiom. Furthermore, of the three "obvious illustrations" cited to show the necessary continuance of King James English, only D&C 136 is clearly created in the image of the KJV. Section 138 uses transitional language, retaining heavy vestiges of Elizabethan style because the section is an inspired commentary on and expansion of certain KJV passages. But the section itself is not unambiguously in KJV form. Section 135 is manifestly *not* in Jacobean idiom; it retains only slight traces of the KJV simply because of its biblical subject matter.

The work of such teachers, sincere though it is, has magnified misconceptions among a younger generation of Latter-day Saints. Thus, the inertia of tradition and the continued absence of a competent public alternative to the personal opinions of J. Reuben Clark, have all helped support the increasingly unopposed reign of the King James Bible in Mormondom. The 1979 publication of an "official" LDS edition of the KJV, widely promoted by Church officials and diverse Mormon organizations, has ensured the dominance of this version for the indefinite future. This publication in essence completed the metamorphosis of the King James Bible from the common into the official version among English-speaking Latter-day Saints.²⁵

As the Church approaches the twenty-first century, it has settled on an early seventeenth-century translation as its official Bible. Prospects for immediate change seem discouraging. But we must remember that Mormon attitudes toward the KJV have evolved in concert with historical processes that continue

²⁵ Of course, this metamorphosis was in its last stages by the early 1970s. By then the primacy of the KJV was assumed by most Saints. The fact that it was President Harold B. Lee (long a protégé of J. Reuben Clark) who initiated the new Bible project probably insured that none but the King James Version was seriously considered (Matthews 1982, 388). For Elder Lee's relationship with President Clark, see Quinn 1983, 57, 88.

The KJV's official stature in contemporary Mormonism is not, of course, the LDS equivalent of a Tridentine censorship of other versions, a prohibition that has never existed in Mormon history. Individual teachers and leaders continue to make use of various versions, and the KJV is official only for English. Several dozen Bibles in foreign languages are approved for missionary and other uses (*Policies* 1981). It is quite possible that Mormon growth in non-English-speaking countries will foster among Church authorities a greater awareness of the KJV's limitations. In 1980, for example (and despite Joseph Smith's praise of what was probably Luther's translation of the German Bible), the Church adopted the Uniform Translation as its official Bible for German-speaking Saints. Unlike the KJV and Luther's version, the Uniform Translation is in contemporary idiom and takes advantage of recent scholarship.

to unfold. Since its inception, Mormonism has time and again proved its resilience and dynamism by creatively adapting to the developments of the modern world. As they look toward the future, informed Saints may be justified in having faith that the present state of affairs is but a way station, not a final resting place.²⁶

APPENDIX

J. Reuben Clark gave the bulk of his attention to the revisions that culminated in the RSV, and he of course did not have access to translations that appeared after his death. However, since he argued that the KJV is singularly loyal to the notion of the divine stature of Jesus, and since others of influence have subsequently depended on his logic, it seems worthwhile to include in the comparison below several modern versions published after Clark last wrote. The chart notes places in the New Testament where the Greek can *possibly* (either by the right choice of textual witnesses or by the appropriate grammatical interpretation) be construed to specifically call Jesus "God." I have adapted the comparison from Victor Perry, "Problem Passages of the New Testament in Some Modern Translations: Does the New Testament Call Jesus God?" (*The Expository Times* 87 [1975-76]: 214-15). An "×" means the version in question directly ascribes deity to Jesus; an "0" means it does not. "Mg." = marginal reading"; NEB = New English Bible; NIV = New International Version; NWT = New World Translation (Jehovah's Witnesses).

	JN. 1:1	JN. 1:18	Acts 20:28	Rom. 9:5	II Thess. 1:12	Titus 2:13	Heb. 1:8	II Pet. 1:1
KJV	×	0	×	×	0	0	×	0
RV	×	0	×	×	0	×	×	×
RV mg.		×	0	0		0		0
RSV	×	0	0	0	0	×	×	×
RSV mg.		×	0	×		0	0	0
NEB	×	0	0	0	0	×	×	×
NEB mg.		×	0	×		0	0	
Moffatt	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	×
Goodspeed	0	0	×	0	0	×	0	×
NIV	×	×	×	×	0	×	×	×
NIV mg.		0	0	0	×			
NWT	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

²⁶ Of various other English translations, the Revised Standard Version is the most widely accepted for scholarly use. It deliberately remains in the King James tradition but adapts to modern knowledge where necessary. The New International Version, produced by conservative evangelical scholars, is a good alternative. The New English Bible, though it tends to overtranslate here and there by rendering what is ambiguous in the original languages as unambiguous in English, is a delightful, readable production, also based on good scholarship. In my view, the very least the Church should do — the most conservative action it could take and still maintain a position of responsible attachment to modern realities — is to consider adopting the *New King James Version*, published in 1979. Yet in truth the New King James, like the old, is hobbled by dependence on what even conservative scholars acknowledge are outdated manuscripts.

The fact and nature of Jesus' divinity were complex issues in the earliest Christian centuries, but the results of the comparison above suggest the hollowness of the assertion that the KJV is the champion defender of this divinity and that the revisions systematically obliterate it. Only the Jehovah's Witnesses' NWT omits all specific references to Jesus' deity. Even Moffatt and Goodspeed, whose liberal propensities have been well publicized by opponents, manage one and three references respectively. The KJV accepts only four of the eight possibilities, the same number as the RSV and NEB. The RV, which so bothered Clark, accepts six such references, two more than the KJV. The evangelical NIV, translated not from the Textus Receptus but from an eclectic Greek text, has the highest incidence of passages suggesting a deified Jesus.

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