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Ray L. Huntington (left) and Brian M. Hauglid (right) visit with Ronald E. Romig about the JST manuscripts and the work of Robert J. Matthews.

# A Community of Christ Perspective on the JST Research by Robert J. Matthews: An Interview with Ronald E. Romig

*Brian M. Hauglid and Ray L. Huntington*

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*Ronald E. Romig is the Community of Christ archivist at Independence, Missouri.*

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*Huntington:* We certainly appreciate the opportunity of meeting with you. Many of our readers may not know who you are, so it might be nice if you could briefly tell us a little about yourself.

**Romig:** I grew up in the neighborhood of the Kirtland Temple in northern Ohio in the midst of a caring church community (RLDS) that was trying to promote the kingdom. When you grow up with those kinds of associations, it gets hold of you. So I just sort of knew that my life's work would be in association with the church, and I always enjoyed the history of the church as well. So that prompted my studies in the social sciences (history) with a teaching degree. When the previous church archivist retired, I saw an opportunity to work for the church.

*Huntington:* Was the retiring archivist Richard Howard?

**Romig:** Richard Howard was the church historian when the first archivist was hired by the Community of Christ, who happened to be Grant McMurray, now the president of the Community of Christ. The second church archivist, the one who preceded me, was Madeline Brunson. Madeline worked as church archivist for about ten years before she retired in 1988. Then I was hired. I had the opportunity to work closely with Dick Howard until his retirement in 1994. Before I became the church archivist, I had done quite a bit of research with primary documents in Utah.

*Hauglid: What type of research were you doing in Salt Lake City?*

**Romig:** I started research about the same time the RLDS Church began seriously thinking about building this facility [the temple]. I had a great interest in understanding the early history of Independence and what had been envisioned in the early days of the church in terms of building the temple. That led me to the LDS archives in Salt Lake City, where a number of the original documents are housed. Steve Sorensen, the current LDS Church archivist, was one of the staff who worked with visiting scholars at the archives, and we became friends. When it came time for me to apply for the position of RLDS archivist, I asked Steve if he would write a letter of recommendation for me, and I think his letter had quite a bit of weight in terms of my selection.

*Hauglid: Robert Matthews has done a wealth of research on the Inspired Version manuscripts, which are now housed in your archives. When did you first become acquainted with the research Robert Matthews was doing on the Joseph Smith manuscripts and the marked Bible?*

**Romig:** Long before the time I began working in the archives, Bob had become a fixture. During my tenure, Bob always had a kind of presence here in the Church History Department; whether physically present or not, he left an impression. Because of the interest of Dick Howard [RLDS historian emeritus] in the Restoration scriptures, and since I worked under Dick, it was pretty hard to avoid hearing about Bob's research. In the 1960s, when Bob came to Independence to study the JST manuscripts, the History Department was located in the auditorium. The library-archives were on the fifth floor. After his initial visit in the late 1960s, Bob came about every two or three years on follow-up visits. He came back as often as possible. It's pretty hard to be around Bob and not become enchanted by his caring, thoughtful personality and his natural curiosity about subjects in which we share a mutual interest.

*Huntington: Aside from hearing about Robert Matthews from Dick Howard, when did you first actually meet Robert Matthews?*

**Romig:** I'd say it was about 1991. It might have been 1990. BYU English professor Royal Skousen was also visiting about the same time working on his critical text project with the Book of Mormon manuscript. Preparation for Skousen's activities distracted me a bit from my first opportunity to meet with Bob.

*Huntington: Was Robert Matthews the first LDS scholar to show interest in the Joseph Smith manuscripts?*

**Romig:** He was the first LDS scholar to actually work with the JST manuscripts. If you have talked with Bob, then you are aware that he made his first request to see the manuscripts in 1960. Bob was persistent, sort of like water dripping on a stone. He also made requests in 1965 and in 1966 and was denied access on each occasion. It took some time before he finally succeeded in viewing the manuscripts.

*Hauglid: Do you think it was just a matter of time before Brother Matthews would have received permission to see the manuscripts, or were there other factors?*

**Romig:** I think his persistence certainly was an important factor in ultimately gaining the desired access, but there has also been a long history associated with the manuscript and external scholarly access.

Bob's request in 1966 included a handwritten note along the bottom. The note said, "Did you know that there were four leading sources just this year who have published accounts that the Inspired Version as published by your church is unreliable?" Now that proved very clever. Bob knew exactly what he was doing. That note was a big factor. After that his request seemed to be taken more seriously. But there were other reasons that contributed to denial of access. An important one was the condition of the manuscript. Charles Davies served as RLDS church historian just before Dick Howard. Dick worked with Charles Davies until Davies resigned in May 1965 due to failing health. Dick was appointed acting historian in June 1965 and named church historian in April 1966. During the early 1960s they had become concerned that the manuscript was increasingly at risk. Years of use were beginning to take their toll. Charles and Dick initiated a program to ensure the preservation of the content of the material. The manuscripts needed to be cataloged and filmed. Initially, they consulted with experts hoping to photograph the manuscripts. However, they found that certain pages just didn't photograph well. They finally settled on microfilming with more successful results. Completion of the microfilming of the manuscripts in 1968, by Dick and his assistant Dan Muir, removed the final obstacle, and they were able to invite Bob to come and work with the manuscripts. I don't think there was ever a feeling that they didn't want to make the material available for research; it was that they wanted to make sure that it was done in a way that wouldn't compromise the integrity of the material. Under Dick's tenure, RLDS historical collections were opened, and by 1966 LDS

scholars were busy in the RLDS archives on a number of projects. Nevertheless, RLDS authorities were still anxious about allowing an LDS scholar to work with our scriptural materials. I think they understood what Bob wanted to do and believed the best about his intentions but were troubled by the possibility that his request may not be totally forthcoming.

*Huntington:* In our interview with Robert Matthews, he mentioned that he had written to President Wallace Smith requesting permission to see the manuscripts. After he had received permission from the Community of Christ to see the manuscripts, he also had the opportunity of meeting President Smith in your archives. In that meeting, President Smith asked Bob if he was officially representing the Mormon Church or his own personal interests. Bob replied that his interest in the manuscript was personal and not tied to the official interests of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Did you ever hear about that meeting between Bob and President Smith? What are your recollections or perceptions of that meeting?

**Romig:** Though a bit presumptuous, in this instance I think Bob was wise in corresponding directly with President Smith. After President W. Wallace Smith received Bob's letter asking to see the manuscripts and marked Bible, he consulted with his counselors, with Dick's supervisor, Apostle Clifford Cole, and with Dick to determine whether this was appropriate or not. Once permission was given and Bob actually came to start work, President Smith was curious for himself about what this fellow was up to. So he took time to come down to meet Bob personally.

*Hauglid:* We know that in this time period, 1968–74, Bob typed up the manuscript on a manual typewriter that the Community of Christ Archives provided him. Do you know anything else about Bob's visits? How was he viewed by his counterparts, such as the historians, the archivists, and others doing research in the archives?

**Romig:** Well, we've talked about the initial anxiety, but Bob eventually became a fixture. He's got a winning personality. He's a gentleman and a scholar. Those attributes quickly won over our staff. I don't think there was anybody who didn't like Bob as a person and didn't come to appreciate what he was doing as a scholar. I think Dick Howard got along well with Bob. Dick enjoyed their association, since they had very similar interests in terms of scriptural scholarship. I think everybody came to look forward to his visits. In terms of how Bob's work has been regarded, his work was basically a landmark study. It has

provided an enormous baseline of information that has been helpful to our institution as well as the larger Restoration community. Bob's research has stood the test of time. A lot of RLDS scholars have not only found Bob's scholarship reliable but have also drawn from it. For example, when Geoffrey Spencer, a scholar and subsequent Apostle, was working on the curriculum for the Temple School in the 1980s, he drew heavily from Bob's research with the manuscript. Bob's perception of the evolution of the various manuscripts and of their relationships to one another was especially helpful. Dick Howard initially developed a different descriptive system for the manuscripts than Bob, but since I have been archivist, we have adopted Bob's numbering system.

***Hauglid:** Why was Bob's numbering system adopted?*

**Romig:** His numbering is more correct! RLDS scholars misunderstood the order and sequence within some of the manuscript materials. What we had called Old Testament Manuscript 1, Bob identified as number 3 and vice versa. As that became better understood, we adopted Bob's numbering sequence. That has proven quite helpful as movement-wide collaborative scholarship with the materials has ensued. Also, Dick Howard indicated that he was informed by Bob's work when he revised his book on the Restoration scriptures in 1995. So I think Bob has been a very positive influence on RLDS scholarship.

***Huntington:** From your perspective, how did Robert Matthews's work with the JST or Inspired Version manuscript impact the relationship between the Community of Christ and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints?*

**Romig:** Well, Bob's scholarship takes place in a larger context of improving relationships between the two churches. But Bob's work certainly occurred at the very beginning of this process. RLDS interaction with Bob provided a sense that this is somebody who is a good, reliable scholar, someone we can depend on. We can step out of the room for a minute while he's with the manuscript, and it will still be there when we come back. In this way, Bob helped break down RLDS stereotypes about LDS. I think this helped us look at the larger universe of our LDS colleagues in a new way, at least in the history arena. And, of course, since we liked Bob, we realized that it was probable that we also could get along with some of his colleagues in the LDS scholarly community. Just as Bob represented the LDS side, I like to give Dick Howard a lot of credit from this side for helping open up those doors, but he is not alone. As LDS and RLDS professors and

scholars became active in the Mormon History Association and the John Whitmer Historical Association, former barriers began to lower. As scholars associated in these professional groups, the positive experiences similar to those early contacts with Bob began to multiply. So I certainly think Bob's ongoing good nature and professionalism went a long way in helping craft better relations.

*Huntington: So really those thirteen visits over that 1968–74 period were important for the RLDS Church at the time?*

**Romig:** Right. It is part of a larger pattern that continues to emerge. It was possible because there were good Christian, caring people on both sides.

*Hauglid: In the early 1970s, the LDS Church organized the Scriptures Publication Committee to start looking at a new edition of the Bible for the Latter-day Saints, and at that point the committee decided that they would like to incorporate some of the Inspired Version in the LDS edition of the Bible. What can you tell us about that time period in terms of how that came about?*

**Romig:** The publishing wing of the LDS Church contacted the publishing wing of our institution, Herald Publishing House, and asked if this was possible. Throughout the years, the RLDS Church has typically answered such requests that most if not all of the text is now in the public domain. Herald House consulted with the RLDS presidency. The presidency invited input from Dick Howard. Dick said, "It's a good idea; let's do this." Also, I think, from the LDS perspective, the committee had already made the decision that they didn't want to reproduce the whole Inspired Version. They preferred to just incorporate significant portions as annotations or footnotes into the forthcoming edition of the scriptures. Because the committee only asked for a limited use, it made it easier for Herald House to say yes.

*Huntington: We've seen a copy of the agreement of the one dollar the RLDS Church requested from the LDS Church.*

**Romig:** Again, I think that through the years, one of the RLDS Church's priorities has been to encourage good scholarship. The Community of Christ continues to be more interested in trying to advance scholarship and make the heritage of the movement available rather than trying to control access. But again, such attitudes continue to grow as relationships improve within the church historical community of the movement. And also, the presidency of the Community of Christ



is now composed of individuals who have had firsthand experiences with these kinds of questions and who have a unique appreciation for the importance and value of making this kind of information as widely available as possible.

***Hauglid:** What are your personal feelings about Joseph Smith's work with the translation of the Bible?*

**Romig:** Well, I find Joseph's revision of the Bible to be an important resource of the church in several ways. Because my primary interest is historical, I see it as an important resource that provides a wealth of information about how early church leaders engaged in big projects, how they collaborated, and how they generated economic support to pursue such projects. It reveals a lot about their thought processes and their level of sophistication in terms of dealing with large, important religious questions. So, from a historical perspective, as an artifact of their lives, it is an incredibly important resource. I don't think we have really come to appreciate the importance of the Inspired Version materials. Joseph's translation continues to have rich value for both scriptural and historical uses. **RE**