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Abstract Review of *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon: A Learning Companion* (1995), by Lynn Matthews Anderson; and *Mormon's Story: An Adaptation Based on the Book of Mormon* (1993), by Timothy B. Wilson.

Lynn Matthews Anderson. *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon: A Learning Companion.* Apple Valley, MN: Estes Book, 1995. 398 pp., with glossary. \$16.95.

Timothy B. Wilson. *Mormon's Story: An Adaptation Based on the Book of Mormon.* No place: no publisher, 1993. 645 pp. \$29.95

Reviewed by Camille S. Williams

Two simplified versions of the Book of Mormon are now available. Both Lynn Matthews Anderson and Timothy B. Wilson began paraphrasing scripture to help their respective children "read and understand the Book of Mormon [even] by themselves."¹ These adapters do not suggest that the Book of Mormon be replaced by simpler versions, but both feel that the "message"² of scripture can be "clarified"³ by modernizing the forms of verbs and pronouns, by using simple sentences, by deleting phrasing they consider extraneous or redundant, by substituting a simpler vocabulary, and by making referents and connectives more specific. They believe these simplified versions will help children and functionally illiterate adults gain a greater understanding and testimony of the sacred text. "For when a message is clear in one's mind, the Spirit is unrestricted in witnessing of its truthfulness" (Wilson, afterword).⁴

Mormon's Story: An Adaptation Based on the Book of Mormon places the simplified text in a column parallel to that of

¹ Lynn Matthews Anderson, "Delighting in Plainness: Issues surrounding a Simple Modern English Book of Mormon," *Sunstone* (March 1993): 20.

² Ibid., 21.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Some might attribute that to the Spirit, rather than to the editor.

the authorized text, which appears in smaller print.⁵ The side-by-side format is intended to provide a "learn-by-comparison format, [so that] readers can familiarize themselves with the language of holy writ and its meaning" (Wilson, introduction). The bright jungle print cover is designed to appeal to children. Only large or stout children, however, will find this hefty volume easy to handle (the spine is 1 1/2 inches thick).

For the most part, Wilson uses the vocabulary of the Book of Mormon; he simplifies primarily by simplifying syntax. While the texts are in parallel columns, the paragraphs in *Mormon's Story* do not correspond to verse divisions. He divides long complex sentences into short sentences and reduces the number of relative and subordinate clauses. He also repeats referents and deletes introductory interjections, binding conjunctions, and parenthetical phrases, such as *behold, my beloved brethren, and now, wherefore*,⁶ *I say unto you*, and that Latter-day Saint favorite, *and it came to pass*. Sometimes the deletions are striking, as in Alma 4:5. The Book of Mormon reads:

And it came to pass in the seventh year of the reign of the judges there were about three thousand five hundred souls that united themselves to the church of God and were baptized. And thus ended the seventh year of the reign of the judges over the people of Nephi; and there was continual peace in all that time.

The same verse from *Mormon's Story* reads:

85 B.C. was a year of peace, during which 3,500 souls were baptized into the church of God.

In the above case, the most significant portions missed by the paraphrase are that the converts actively *united themselves to the church* (as well as the passive-sounding *were baptized*) and that the judges were *over the people of Nephi*. In the paraphrasing of some other verses, however, it is arguable that the plain sense of

⁵ The 8 1/2 x 11-inch pages include column headings listing the range of verses on the page, e.g., 2 Nephi 4:11–20, and the content or topic of the verses, e.g., "Lehi's last words. Nephi's psalm . . ." (Wilson, 70).

⁶ For examples of these deletions, see 2 Nephi 31:14–32:6.

the passage is marred by the deletion of substantive material and the destruction of parallel syntax within the verse. In our day, we prize the concise sentence with active verbs as strong and direct. Intensification in scripture relies rather on expansion of the sentence through an accumulation of repetition and parallelism, as in 1 Nephi 17:30–31, which reads (bracketed phrases are portions deleted or changed by Wilson):

[And notwithstanding] they being led, the Lord their God, their Redeemer, going before them, [leading them] by day and giving light unto them by night, and doing all things for them which were expedient [for man to receive], they hardened their hearts [and blinded their minds], and [reviled] against Moses and [against the true and living] God.

And [it came to pass that according to] his word he did destroy them; and [according to] his word he did lead them; [and according to his word he did do all things for them; and there was not any thing done save it were by his word].

The two verses in *Mormon's Story* read like this (added material is italicized):

After being led by the Lord their God, their Redeemer, who went before them by day, who gave them light by night, and did all things for them that *they needed*, they *still* hardened their hearts and *rebelled* against Moses and against God. And by *the Lord's* word, He destroyed the children of Israel *in their rebellion*, or by His word, He led *and nourished* them *in the wilderness*.

Reviled becomes *rebelled*; *nourished* summarizes *doing all things for them which were expedient for man to receive*; *in their rebellion* provides an explicit causal link for the destruction; *in the wilderness* is repeated from a previous verse. Wilson's substitution of *rebelled* for *reviled* significantly changes the plain sense of the phrase and weakens the causal link he so carefully proposes in his paraphrase. In other passages, he arguably infuses more intensity; the relative strength of a statement is part of the message. Many

readers will find these changes disconcerting, but easily evaluated by checking the authorized text on the same page. It is puzzling, though, when a paraphrase adopts contemporary phrasing that is significantly different from the plain sense of the passage, as in Alma 5:26, where "if ye have felt to sing the song of redeeming love, . . . can ye feel so now?" becomes "In the past, if you . . . have wanted to sing the song of redeeming love, how do you feel now?" Or notice the turn given Alma 5:6, in which "have you sufficiently retained in remembrance the captivity of your fathers?" becomes "have you completely forgotten your fathers' captivity?" Not only is the sense significantly different, but the tie to the use of *remembrance* elsewhere in the Book of Mormon, and in other books of scripture, is lost.

Wilson marks the chronology of the books by adding the year the recorded incidents occurred or the year the record was written. For example, 1 Nephi 1:1 is preceded by the italicized year (*600 B.C.*); as is Words of Mormon 1 (*385 A.D.*). In Ether 1:1, historical information is inserted into the text: "Now I, Moroni, will begin engraving my account of those ancient people who lived for about 1,600 years in the northern lands before annihilating themselves."⁷

Quotation marks are inserted (not always accurately) to aid the reader in distinguishing between the narrative of the scribe and the recorded speeches or conversations of the individuals in the account. For example, in Mosiah 12:20–24 the priests of King Noah ask Abinadi to interpret scripture. Double and single quotation marks are used to indicate the speech by the priests and the passage quoted from Isaiah. While the use of quotation marks may seem heavy-handed in a relatively short, direct interchange such as this, they serve as a discreet reminder to readers, some of whom may be reading only short passages, or sections of text out of sequence, to check to see who is being quoted. These are editorial decisions, of course; given the difference between writing what was said and directly quoting someone, the quotation marks should not be given undue authority.

⁷ Wilson uses *annihilating themselves*, and adds a paraphrase of Mormon 4:5: "The Lord allows the wicked to destroy the wicked." Ether 1:1 actually says that "those ancient inhabitants . . . were destroyed by the hand of the Lord."

On the whole, Wilson's paraphrase leaves more of the Book of Mormon intact than does Lynn Matthews Anderson's *The Easy-to-Read Book of Mormon*. In addition to the kinds of changes Wilson makes in the text, Matthews Anderson uses "simple, modern English [words] on approximately a fifth-grade reading level."⁸ She includes a paraphrase of the title page (p. ix), a paraphrase of portions of the Joseph Smith–History (pp. 381–84), a paraphrase of the respective testimonies of the three witnesses and the eight witnesses (p. 385), a glossary (pp. 386–92), and an alphabetical listing of important stories and people (pp. 393–98). The design of the book is not as helpful as it might be. Her paraphrase is printed in double columns, with no column or page headings; chapter numbers are spelled out. She has revised selected passages to make them overtly gender inclusive by changing *brethren* to *brothers [and sisters]* but has deleted most of the earlier edition's feminist commentary from the "To the Reader" section. Although Matthews Anderson's years of work have resulted in a generally simple paraphrase of the Book of Mormon text, problems and inconsistencies remain.

Matthews Anderson feels that there is little "poetic or beautiful phraseology lost through updating and simplifying the Book of Mormon."⁹ For this reason, in Nephi's psalm (2 Nephi 4:16–30) the metaphorical and active *sorroweth*, *grieveth*, and *groaneth*¹⁰ are all rendered as *is very sad*; *I am encompassed about* becomes *I am full of sadness*; *why should . . . my soul linger in the valley of sorrow* becomes *why should . . . my soul be sad*. In addition to the loss of metaphor, the rhythm of passages is marred and meaning is lost when she replaces *grieve* and *sorrow* with *sad*.¹¹

For words which have no easy equivalent she provides a glossary. For example, the glossary defines *resurrection* as "to rise from the dead; the time when one's spirit is joined to an *immortal* body forever," a competent definition when both clauses are

⁸ Matthews Anderson, "Delighting in Plainness," 21.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 27.

¹⁰ She uses *groan* in 1 Nephi 19:12 and 3 Nephi 17:14, but not in 2 Nephi 4:19 or in 3 Nephi 8:23; 10:9.

¹¹ *Grieve* can, of course, include the senses "to offend or provoke," which Matthews Anderson ignores.

combined. The reader who sees these as two separate definitions might be inclined to see the raising of Lazarus (John 11:1–44) and the son of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11–15) as instances of resurrection. Her use of easy equivalents is sometimes inconsistent, however. For example, Matthews Anderson uses *resurrection* and *atonement* in 2 Nephi 9:6–7, and also in Alma 42:23, but substitutes *sacrifice* for *atonement* and *live again* for *resurrection* in Jacob 4:11–12.

She defines *witnesses* as “people who see and hear things for themselves; people who tell others about the things they have seen and heard.” This is an informal sense of the word only, ignoring the link to religious and secular law that is heavily used in scripture. Matthews Anderson is comfortable using *witness* as a noun, but avoids using it as a verb, substituting *see* or *show*, as in her paraphrase of the sacrament prayers in Moroni 4 and 5.

Given the fact that many of her readers will already be participants in Latter-day Saint practices of worship, her paraphrase of the sacrament prayers is surprising (Wilson does not paraphrase those prayers). One of the ways the language of worship is learned is through repeated exposure to it in all the books of scripture, in Church meetings, in the singing of hymns, and in the performance of ordinances, including temple ordinances. Not all of us will study the usage of words in scripture and Latter-day Saint practice, but all of us learn the senses, the connections, and connotations of our religious vocabulary from our exposure to it throughout our lives. To destroy the phrasal and conceptual links between the Book of Mormon, other books of scripture, and Latter-day Saint practice seems a net loss for everyone.

In her paraphrase of the sacrament prayers Matthews Anderson substitutes *make holy* for *sanctify*; *eat* for *partake*; *want to be called by* for *willing to take upon them*; *in memory* for *in remembrance*; *sacrificed* for *shed*; and *show* for *witness*. In general, the paraphrase uses words with senses more passive than those in the text, all of which require significant activity on the part of those participating in the covenant. Throughout the scriptures and in our ordinances these words are used in reference to the fall, covenants with God, the atonement, and exaltation.

For example, the Lord commanded Moses in Exodus 13:2: “Sanctify unto me all the firstborn” (as Christ was firstborn and

sanctified); Hebrews 13:12 uses that word to describe Jesus' sacrifice to sanctify his people with his own blood. Moses 6:59–62 links blood, water, and spirit with the creation, the fall, the atonement, and exaltation.

The word *partake* (in various forms) is used by Lehi (2 Nephi 2), Nephi (2 Nephi 26), and Alma (Alma 12) in their discourses on the fall, atonement, and resurrection;¹² Christ himself uses that word concerning his work in our behalf (D&C 19:19). *Take upon* is a set phrase used throughout scripture; it is used specifically to describe Christ's *taking upon* himself flesh and blood,¹³ his *taking upon* himself our sins and afflictions,¹⁴ and believers being baptized and *taking upon* themselves his name.¹⁵ *In remembrance* is a set phrase used by Christ in connection with the sacrament;¹⁶ Christ also used *shed*¹⁷ and *witness*¹⁸ when explaining the meaning of the ordinance of the sacrament. Given the breadth of the use of these words, and their symbolic and doctrinal depth, it seems that in this case, at least, to paraphrase is to limit severely for the reader the experience of participating in the ordinance. The paraphrase provides minimal comprehension, but prevents maximum understanding.

These books are hard for me to read, particularly the Matthews Anderson version. This is, in part, a philosophical disagreement. I do not believe that the scriptures comprise a body of information which we are to decode, process, and pray about; nor do I agree that these adaptations, even if made in good faith, will be "instrument[s] to help make those true messages clear in the mind of the reader, the place where all testimonies begin"

¹² See 2 Nephi 2:18–19; 2 Nephi 26:24–33 (compare the use of *partake* in Lehi's dream, 1 Nephi 8:11–25); and Alma 12:21–23.

¹³ See, for example, Mosiah 7:27; Ether 3:9.

¹⁴ See, for example, Mosiah 7:11–12; Alma 7:13; 11:40; 34:8; compare the use of *bear* in Isaiah 53.

¹⁵ See, for example, 2 Nephi 31:13; Mosiah 5:8; 25:23; Alma 34:38; 46:18–21; 3 Nephi 27:5; Mormon 8:38; D&C 18:21–28; 20:37, 77; compare variations of the theme in Matthew 28:12; Abraham 1:18.

¹⁶ See Luke 22:19 and 3 Nephi 18:7–11 (Christ's introduction of the sacrament). Compare with 1 Corinthians 11:23–25 and D&C 20:77–79. See also Luke 1:54 (Mary's Song).

¹⁷ 3 Nephi 18:11; D&C 27:2.

¹⁸ 3 Nephi 18:10–11.

(Wilson, afterword). Nor do I think that testimonies are built primarily by solitary souls reading controlled vocabulary texts.

Surely there is much to learn from the scriptures, but the kind of learning to be done is qualitatively different from the technical writer's task of stripping ambiguity from a set of directions for programming a VCR.

Which of us with a testimony borne of the spirit can explain *clearly* and *simply* how the atonement works, or how it is that light and life reside in any of us? Nevertheless, we can with our limited understanding receive a witness that there is an atonement, and that Christ is the Light and the Life of the World. Even the adapters are helpless to simplify this most metaphorical, most basic Christian message.¹⁹

Before we move to simplifying our language of worship, we might try immersing ourselves and our children in it in order to learn it. Scripture records God's dealings with his people and invites us to be a part of the familial conversation.²⁰ We learn what it means to live with the scriptures in our hearts by reading together as families and by listening to the living prophets. Much of what we learn is less informational than it is experiential: we do not learn from the scriptures the definitions of *repentance*, *forgiveness*, *hardheartedness*, or *joy*; by the spirit we begin to feel

¹⁹ Neither Wilson nor Matthews Anderson paraphrases *light and life* in Alma 38:9; 3 Nephi 9:18; 11:11; or Ether 4:12. But the phrase *joy because of the light of Christ unto life* in Alma 28:14 is paraphrased by Wilson as *joy for those who live in Christ's light*, and by Matthews Anderson as *happiness because of Christ's light, which brings people to eternal life*.

²⁰ My first testimony of scripture came at Sunday dinner after church, listening to my father and grandfather quote scripture as a natural part of the discussion. My father's voice is unforgettably direct:

But whom say ye that I am?

And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God.

And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 16:15-17)

The printed word on the page—the flesh and blood of scripture—must be animated by the spirit speaking to the reader/speaker/hearer.

*repentant, forgiving.*²¹ We feel to shrink from our own *hardheartedness* or to rejoice as *we feel to sing the song of redeeming love*. Parents and children, brothers and sisters, wives and husbands ought to be sharing these experiences with each other; we ought not find ways to separate the young or the unlearned from the language of the body of the church.

At the very least, we should take heed of the experience of those churches which have in this century revised the language of their sacred texts. Protestants and Catholics who began simplifying the Bible five decades ago are now lamenting that "Most Christians under thirty no longer have in common a reservoir of biblical texts recognized by all, and are likely unable to recognize the biblical allusions woven throughout English literary history."²² We who have four volumes of scripture—each with a somewhat different language—do face a considerable responsibility in learning the language of those texts.

These paraphrases lose imagery that is present in all the scriptures; they drop some phrases and clauses altogether. These authors, by virtue of retaining some religious vocabulary, have produced works in which the register ranges from the most formal to the colloquial. Learning these artificial languages may be a harder task than learning the actual language of the scriptures.

In an age of irreverence, I am loath to see us lose a language worthy of the God we worship. This is not to say I think God is a snob who won't listen to a prayer if addressed as *you*. But neither do I think we lack the capacity to augment the language of our own place and time: the language of scripture can be learned as another dialect of English. Further, I think that there are times when we long for a language better than our everyday usage. I notice this particularly with young fathers blessing their babies. Some falter between *thou* and *you*, veering between directly addressing God and directly addressing the child (in addition to referring to the child's parents in the third person). The ordinances of the gospel do not belong to us individually. They link

²¹ For a discussion of this view, see Arthur H. King's analysis of the parable of the father and his two sons in *The Abundance of the Heart* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1986), 116–17, 166–67, 179.

²² Father Richard J. Neuhaus, "The Perfectly Revised Version," *First Things* 52 (April 1995): 59.

us with all who have gone before us and all who will come after us. We need a language that will keep our focus on that unending familial relationship. We have that language in scripture, in temple and other ordinances, in our hymns, and to some extent in our prayers.

I think it wise to be wary of tinkering with the language given us in modern scripture. I exclaim with Matthews Anderson:

O, the tricky plan of the evil one! O, the weakness and foolishness of people! When they are educated, they think they are wise, and they do not listen to what God says, because they think they know more than he does.
(2 Nephi 9:28)