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Coming to Terms: The Challenge of Creating Christian Vocabulary in a Non-Christian Land

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The Illusion of Communication

"In the beginning was the word." Leaving to others the explication of the multiple meanings of *logos* (the Greek term that was translated into *word* by English Bible translators), my concern in this essay is the dilemma of trying to communicate absolute truth by means of the imperfect, human languages that hobbled forth from the wreckage after the collapse of the Tower of Babel. However we wish to deconstruct the layers of meaning in John 1:1, it is sufficient for my purposes here to propose that because "the Word was God," or "the Word was with God," or even, in Joseph Smith's translation, "the gospel was the word," we must consider the "Word," as He and It reside in the heavens, to be a perfect mode of communicating a perfect truth. Surely there was and is a celestial language. But it did not take very long after the beginnings of life on earth for a being who was not of the heavens to begin the perpetual process of deceiving Adam and Eve and their posterity by using *words* (with a lowercase *w*) to twist the truth, to express half-truths (we should remember that language is one of the primary means through which the father of lies tells his lies), and to lead us away from the Living Logos and into a fallen realm of degraded language that would become even more diverse and corrupt in the wake of the blunder of Babel.

To put it simply, I am proposing that part of what must have happened at the time of the Fall was the corruption of our ability to communicate, a calamity that rendered us half-mutes, able only to *approximate* imperfectly what we think and feel, and so often frustrated in our failure to convey those thoughts and feelings unadulterated to others. Because, as Arthur Miller

puts it, "we meet unblessed . . . after, after the fall,"[1] part of our fallenness was and is manifest in the disconnect between the objective world, individual thought, and the words through which we can describe our apprehensions of that world and interpretations of our thoughts. After Eden, we are separated from God and from one another, not just because of our different languages but also within the realm of our common languages. The great Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset observes:

> Let us say, then, that Man, when he begins to speak, does so *because* he thinks that he is going to be able to say what he thinks. Well, this is illusory. Language doesn't offer that much. It says, a little more or less, a portion of what we think, while it sets an insurmountable obstacle in place, blocking a transmission of the rest. . . . Languages separate us and discommunicate, not simply because they are different languages, but because they proceed from different mental pictures, from disparate intellectual systems—in the last instance, from divergent philosophies. Not only do we speak, but we also think in a specific language, and intellectually slide along preestablished rails prescribed by our verbal system.[2]

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1. Arthur Miller, *After the Fall* (New York: Bantam Books, 1965), 162.

2. José Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and the Splendor of Translation," trans. Elizabeth Gamble Miller, in *Theories of Translation: An Anthology of Essays from Dryden to Derrida*, ed. Rainer Schulte and John Biguenet (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 101. Ortega expresses here a theory of language and communication that fits well within what came to be called structural linguistics, a philosophy that assumes languages are actually distinct worldviews and are therefore theoretically impossible to translate. As Anthony Pym puts it, "Since different languages cut the world up in very different ways, no words should be completely translatable out of their language system. Translation should simply be impossible." And yet, concedes Pym, himself director of postgraduate programs in translation and intercultural studies at Rovira i Virgili University in Spain, "translators exist, they produce, and their products are found to be useful." Anthony Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories* (UK: Abingdon; New York: Routledge, 2010), 10. This more practical view of language led, in the 1960s and 1970s, to natural equivalence theories of translation and numerous procedures to uncover (or create) that presumed equivalence between languages, some of which I will discuss below. Inevitable shortcomings in natural equivalence theory led, in turn, to subsequent theories of translation.

The important point here is that translation theory is by no means a settled matter, and vastly differing theories can have valid observations, applications, and reasons for their existence. No single theory of translation is adequate in dealing with the myriad challenges and conundrums inherent in transferring both form and content from one language to another. Consequently, no human translation is ever perfect. Perfect equivalence may occur occasionally with words or phrases, but at the document level, and probably even at the paragraph level, it is beyond human capacity to achieve. Ortega, in this essay on the misery and splendor of translation, maintains that translation is a form of utopianism—the striving toward an

By Ortega's reasoning, then, the "things . . . in heaven" cannot ever be fully and clearly expressed by these "things . . . in the earth" (D&C 88:79) that we call language, since in the terrestrial realm we now dwell in what Frederic Jameson called the "prison house of language."[3] Joseph Smith, at least early in his prophetic career, apparently agreed with this assessment. In a letter to William W. Phelps, Joseph lamented, "Oh Lord God deliver us in thy due time from the little narrow prison almost as it were totel darkness of paper pen and ink and a crooked broken scattered and imperfect language."[4] The Prophet, who was attempting to find appropriate expression for revelations from the Lord that were apparently given more as nonverbal concepts than as word-for-word dictations, may have concurred with a distinction made

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ideal—but he makes a distinction between bad utopianism (the belief that "because [translation] is *desirable,* it is possible" [p. 98]) and good utopianism ("*because* it would be desirable to free men from the divisions imposed by languages, there is little probability that it can be attained; therefore, it can only be achieved to an approximate measure" [pp. 98–99]). Incidentally, my use of quotations from Ortega is, as some readers may have already discerned, somewhat paradoxical, since these are but translations of his actual words in Spanish and therefore only approximately capture his intended meaning. Ortega argues that a "translation is not the work, but a path toward the work" (p. 109), and therefore recommends creating diverse translations, each emphasizing a different dimension of the original work, in order to come even closer to a complete understanding of the original.

As this article was going to press, a new and insightful book by David Bellos, director of the Program in Translation and Intercultural Communication at Princeton University, was published. Titled *Is That a Fish in Your Ear? Translation and the Meaning of Everything* (New York: Faber and Faber, 2011), the book argues for a practical, positive view of translation: "No translation is the same as its source, and no translation can be expected to be like its source in more than a few selected ways. . . . When we say that a translation is an acceptable one, what we name is an overall relationship between source and target that is neither identity, nor equivalence, nor analogy—just that complex thing called *a good match*" (322; emphasis added). Ultimately the argument Bellos (a prize-winning translator himself) makes is that a translation isn't designed to supplant the original text, but rather to be like it, to match it in ways acceptable to the target reading community.

3. The complete title of Jameson's 1972 book is *The Prison House of Language: A Critical Account of Structuralism and Russian Formalism,* published by Princeton University Press. As Ernst Beller points out, the phrase "prison house of language" is attributed to Nietzsche, but is in fact a rather too loose translation of a phrase that should have been rendered something like "the constraint of language." See Beller, "Translating Nietzsche in the United States," in *Translating Literatures, Translating Cultures: New Vistas and Approaches in Literary Studies,* ed. Kurt Mueller-Vollmer and Michael Irmscher (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1998), 142.

4. Joseph Smith to William W. Phelps, July 31, 1832, in Joseph Smith Jr., *The Personal Writings of Joseph Smith,* ed. Dean C. Jessee, rev. ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2002), 287, original spelling and punctuation preserved.

by the German philosopher Martin Heidegger: "Translation is one thing with respect to a business letter, and something quite different with respect to a poem. The letter is translatable; the poem is not."[5] On a continuum from business letters to poems, scripture, whether being translated into another language or being received as inspired ideas, would certainly fall closer to poetry than to business correspondence. Both scripture and poetry produce multiple levels of meaning, liberally employ symbolism, and often marry content with form in ways not manifested in more mundane types of writing. Extending this idea even further, German linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt noted that "all forms of language are symbols, not the objects themselves, not prearranged signs, but sounds; they find themselves, together with the objects and ideas that they represent, filtered through the mind in which they originated and continue to originate in a real or, one might even say, a mystical relationship."[6] Because words, in any of the languages of mortality, are not actual concrete objects but simply "sounds," "symbols," or "signifiers" that at best can only be a shadowy approximation of reality and truth, we must regard language as one of the slipperiest of the slippery treasures of mortality. If language itself produces, at best, a shadowy approximation of reality and truth, then translating that shadowy approximation from one language to another significantly compounds the slipperiness.

While some languages share a common ancestry and are spoken in countries with similar cultures (English and German, for instance), other languages are truly foreign to each other, in almost every way possible. English and Japanese would certainly fall into the latter category. Thus, finding instances of natural equivalence should be far more likely in closely related languages, which suggests that translation between truly "foreign" languages should be much more challenging. Since my own experience with translation involves English and Japanese, the questions I will address in this paper are: What are the challenges inherent in attempting to translate Christian doctrine and, specifically, LDS vocabulary into Japanese, a traditionally non-Christian language; what approaches have been employed in this effort; how effective have these efforts been; and what, if anything, can translators do to increase their effectiveness?

5. Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Pfullingen: Neske, 1957), 163, translation in Pym, *Exploring Translation Theories,* 99.

6. Wilhelm von Humboldt, "From the Introduction to His Translation of *Agamemnon,*" trans. Sharon Sloan, in Schulte and Biguenet, *Theories of Translation*, 57.

Translating Revealed Truth into Japanese

In 2005, I published an article on the three Japanese translations of the Book of Mormon.[7] More recently, a splendid article by Professor Shinji Takagi, focusing on the 1909 translation, appeared in the *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture.*[8] Takagi's article makes a valuable contribution to our understanding of the process of translating the Book of Mormon into a language such as Japanese, a language that has been used for a few millennia without the underpinnings of Judeo-Christian culture and, for most of its history, without a need for vocabulary to discuss the doctrines of Christianity, either sectarian or revealed.

I am persuaded that the challenge of translating our unique LDS theological vocabulary is not limited to renderings into the languages of non-Christian nations. We are all familiar with the obstacles we face in helping those of sectarian Christianity understand that we mean something different from their understanding when we use such words as *godhead* or *Son of God* or *salvation* or *the Fall* or *grace* or *soul* or myriad other key terms. The questions I will raise here involve not just the challenge of translating ideas into a foreign language, but also the more fundamental difficulty of conveying absolute truth in the very ambiguous, ephemeral medium we call "language." John Dryden succinctly captures the impossible assignment of the translator when he says, "'Tis much like dancing on ropes with fettered legs."[9] Schopenhauer, too, came up with a compelling metaphor to describe the challenge: "A library of translations resembles a gallery with reproductions of paintings."[10]

In my earlier article on Japanese translations of the Book of Mormon, I spent a good deal of space discussing some of the choices that the superb translators made when rendering the religious vocabulary in that book of scripture into Japanese. Professor Takagi, in his article, however, respectfully

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7. Van C. Gessel, "'Strange Characters and Expressions': Three Japanese Translations of the Book of Mormon," in *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 14, no. 1 (2005): 32–47. A revised version of that essay, under the title "Languages of the Lord: The Japanese Translations of the Book of Mormon," appeared in *Taking the Gospel to the Japanese, 1901–2001,* ed. Reid Neilson and Van C. Gessel (Provo, Utah: Brigham Young University Press, 2006), 233–61.

8. Shinji Takagi, "Proclaiming the Way in Japanese: The 1909 Translation of the Book of Mormon," *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 18, no. 2 (2009): 18–37.

9. John Dryden, "On Translation," in Schulte and Biguenet, *Theories of Translation,* 18.

10. Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Language and Words," in Schulte and Biguenet, *Theories of Translation,* 33.

responds to my arguments by asserting that "the choice of words to express foreign concepts is not fundamental to the process of interlingual translation. If, for example, there is no equivalent word in Japanese for a certain concept, all we have to do is create one (as was frequently done during the nineteenth century). . . . If there are religious words the average Japanese reader is not familiar with, it is a question of education. . . . The assignment of words is essentially a simple case of literal information transfer, conceptually the most straightforward aspect of translation."[11]

My training and research in literature predisposes me to have somewhat less faith in words and in the ability of education to close the gap between speaker intention and listener comprehension, especially when those words allow multiple shades of meaning and open the door to a variety of interpretations. In some ways, this may reflect the different attitudes toward language represented by those in more practical disciplines and those in the humanities. In the worldview of the accountant, for instance, things equate, they add up, they are consistent and reliable. Many students of literature, however, labor under the curse of ambiguity and the blight of multiple, relative meanings. But the history of travails experienced by Christian missionaries ever since Francis Xavier set foot on Japanese soil in 1549 persuades me that translating religious terms into Japanese is not so straightforward an issue as Professor Takagi makes it appear to be. As Christian translators have attempted to borrow words from other languages or invent Japanese terms that somehow summon up the same kinds of spiritual associations that words in the Indo-European languages do, their levels of success have been somewhat underwhelming.

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11. Takagi, "Proclaiming the Way," 34–35. I am, of course, not arguing against the need for education; it lies at the core of understanding language to any extent. But education works best with narrowly defined nouns, as evidenced by the myriad English terms that have been adopted by other languages. But complex religious concepts such as *atonement* are much more difficult to create equivalence for in a traditionally non-Christian language. Over time, with repeated use and education, "created" words can come to acquire at least some of the subtleties of meaning they were intended to assume. This, however, applies only among those who have repeated exposure to the terms. Thus, a word may mean something very specific to a Church member, but a nonmember investigating the Church may be bewildered by the unfamiliar meaning attached to it. As suggested above, however, this is not just a problem in translation. English-speaking investigators may at first be baffled by our peculiar usage of such terms as *Beehive, Laurel, Mutual, endowment, fast Sunday,* or *agency* and may wonder why we refer to nineteen-year-olds as elders and twelve-year-olds as deacons.

"The Smile of the Gods"

One of Japan's great modern masters of the short story form, Akutagawa Ryūnosuke 芥川龍之介, created a splendid metaphor for the dilemma I am trying to describe. In his 1921 story, "Kamigami no bishō"「神々の微笑」(The Smile of the Gods), Akutagawa presents a theological debate between a Catholic missionary laboring in Japan in the early seventeenth century and one of the native gods of the land who has survived for centuries in the syncretic stew in which native Shintoism, along with Buddhism and all the other faiths that have come to Japan, have learned to coexist in hazy harmony with one another. When Organtino, the Catholic priest, insists that he is having success in winning converts to Christianity, the ancient deity, far from feeling threatened, replies that the native Japanese gods have survived the importation of Buddhism just fine, thank you, and that the coming of Christian beliefs will not make any significant difference in how the Japanese visualize the beings they worship. He insists that when Japanese Buddhists fall asleep and dream of the Buddhist sun god, Dainichi, the image that appears before them is that of their own indigenous Shinto sun goddess, Amaterasu. And he asserts that the Japanese who are converted to Christianity will likewise cling within their own minds and hearts to images of the Western God that are indistinguishable from the faces and forms of the native gods they have worshipped for centuries. The power of the local deities, he proudly announces, is not the power to destroy foreign ideologies, but the more insidious power to "transform" (造り変える) them, to "recreate" imported gods in the image of their own idols, as it were. (If I may be allowed the liberty, it is the power to "translate" God in their own terms.) Just before he disappears from view, the Japanese god warns Organtino, "You must be on your guard. Your God will not necessarily win [this battle]. No matter how widely your Christian teachings spread throughout the country, it doesn't necessarily mean you have been victorious. . . . Even your God may just be transformed into one of our native gods, just as those who came here from China and India were transformed. We [Japanese gods] are in the trees, in the shallow streams, in the breezes that blow across [your imported] roses, and in the evening glow that shines on your temple walls. We are everywhere, at all times. You must be on your guard!"[12]

12. Akutagawa Ryūnosuke, "Kamigami no bishō," in *Hōkyōnin no shi* (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1968), 96–97. The translation here is mine. An English translation of this story was published in *Japanese Religions* 31, no. 1 (January 2006): 39–44.

Latter-day Linguistic Challenges

Latter-day Saints were late in joining in the process of translating Christian vocabulary into Japanese. When Heber J. Grant led the first contingent of missionaries into Japan in 1901, he was arriving forty-two years after the Protestants (who had produced their translation of the New Testament in 1880), while the Catholics had been fighting terminology turf wars since Xavier's arrival in 1549. During the five years between 1904 and 1909, when a very young and phenomenally gifted Alma O. Taylor completed the first Japanese translation of the Book of Mormon, he made a number of inquiries of the First Presidency regarding the proper interpretation of certain unique doctrinal terms so that he might seek out a suitable Japanese translation for them. For instance, he wrote to the Brethren in April 1908, "There is no word in Japanese for 'soul' which could possibly be stretched to include both body and spirit."[13] For the most part, however, Taylor seems to have made the only choice that any translator wishing to maintain a modicum of sanity would have made in the same circumstances: for most of the Christian vocabulary that appears in the Book of Mormon, he adopted the Japanese terms that had already appeared in the Protestant New Testament translation, since, as Professor Takagi notes, "The task of assigning existing words or inventing new words for most abstract Western concepts had largely been completed by the turn of the twentieth century."[14] Left unanswered is the question of whether the appropriated Protestant choices—a few of which I will examine herein—are adequate to convey the essence of truth as revealed through the sacred writings and prophets of the Restoration.

I will focus on four general categories of religious vocabulary translation that highlight the challenges we face in trying to help individuals in a non-Christian nation understand what we are trying to teach. While my examples will be drawn from Japan, similar examples could no doubt be found in other cultures.

1. Words that have been appropriated from existing Japanese religious vocabulary

The initial entry in this category must be the attempts that Xavier made to come up with a proper term to translate the Catholic concept of "God" into Japanese. Because his own knowledge of Japanese was minimal at best,

13. Alma O. Taylor to the First Presidency, April 15, 1908, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City. The quotation is printed in context in Gessel, "'Strange Characters and Expressions,'" 44.

14. Takagi, "Proclaiming the Way," 35.

Xavier had to rely upon Anjirō,[15] the first Japanese Christian, who was baptized in Goa in 1548.[16] Anjirō had been a merchant in Kagoshima but fled Japan in 1546 after purportedly committing a murder. He studied Portuguese in Goa, and following his conversion and baptism, he was chosen to accompany Xavier to Japan. Because he was the only member of the Catholic party who was in any respect qualified to translate their religious concepts from Portuguese into Japanese, Anjirō by default became the first Christian to attempt to identify Japanese words that could convey their beliefs. Though contemporary Jesuit accounts praise him for his faith and his intelligence, he had not been well educated before fleeing Japan, was marginally literate in the written Japanese language, and knew very little about native Japanese religious beliefs and practices. Left essentially to his own devices, and unable to receive any specific guidance from the fathers who commissioned him to translate for them, Anjirō did the best he could by studying and then applying primarily Japanese Buddhist terminology to explain Christian ideas. As one sympathetic modern Japanese historian has noted, "Buddhist terms were perhaps the only available Japanese counterparts to express salvific religious and philosophical concepts of Christianity."[17]

Consequently, for nearly two years after his arrival in Japan, Xavier went about the countryside preaching that salvation could come to the Japanese people only if they set aside their heathen beliefs and put their faith in the One True God, whom, at Anjirō's recommendation, he called *Dainichi* 大日. But *Dainichi* is the Japanese name for Vairocana, the "cosmic Buddha; the focus of devotion in Esoteric Buddhism. . . . He is the principle or the essence of the universe and all phenomena are embraced in him; Dainichi is thus the Buddha of beginningless and endless ultimate reality."[18] Xavier became uneasy when priests of the Shingon Buddhist sect welcomed his preaching, and further inquiry revealed to him the horror of the mistake he was making, all unwittingly. Despairing of the possibility of finding a suitable Japanese equivalent for the Christian notion of God, he immediately switched to the use of the Latin and Portuguese term, *Deus.*[19]

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15. In some sources, his name is given as Yajirō.

16. Goa is a small state on the western coast of India that was captured by Portugal in 1510.

17. This is a paraphrase of Ebisawa Arimichi's argument, which is cited in Ikuo Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan: Kirishitan Belief and Practice* (London: Brill, 2001), 9. I have followed Higashibaba for many of the details in this summary of Xavier's linguistic dilemma.

18. *Kodansha Encyclopedia of Japan,* 9 vols. (Tokyo: Kodansha, 1983), 2:64.

19. This became problematic for Xavier, since Buddhists in Kyushu mocked him because the Japanese transliteration of *Deus* was *Deusu,* which they claimed was a dialectical pronunciation of *Daiuso,* meaning "The Great Lie."

I shall return shortly to the problems raised by the japanizing of foreign words, which began with the work of Xavier and continues today, but first we must go back to the question of how to give a name to the object of our worship in a language that does not know God. Ortega makes an insightful observation about the challenge of conveying religious concepts to a culture that does not share those fundamental concepts:

> The Basque language . . . forgot to include in its vocabulary a term to designate God and it was necessary to pick a phrase that meant "lord over the heights"—*Jaungoikua.* Since centuries ago lordly authority disappeared, *Jaungoikua* today means God directly, but we must place ourselves in the time when one was obliged to think of God as a political, worldly authority, to think of God as a civil governor or the like. To be exact, this case reveals to us that *lacking a name for God made it very difficult for the Basques to think about God*. For that reason they were very slow in being converted to Christianity; the word *Jaungoikua* also indicates that police intervention was necessary in order to put the mere idea of divinity into their heads. So language not only makes the expression of certain thoughts difficult, but it also impedes their reception by others; it paralyzes our intelligence in certain directions.[20]

In the case of Japan, it appears from the historical records that by 1582, when several of the young sons of Christian warlords traveled to Europe as the first Japanese to lay eyes on the nations of the West, a new term for God, which had won out over several other possibilities,[21] was in common usage among the Japanese Christians. The term was *Tenshu* 天主, which literally means "the Lord of heaven." At a later date, Catholicism became known as *Tenshukyō*, or the "religion of the Lord of heaven." But less than fifty years after that youthful embassy journeyed to the West, Christianity and its accompanying vocabulary had been all but swept from the minds and hearts of the Japanese due to fierce governmental persecutions that produced thousands of martyrs and apostates alike.

The translation problem reared its persistent head again in the latter part of the nineteenth century, when both Protestant and Catholic missionaries were allowed back into Japan and, after 1873, given permission to teach their faith not just to foreign residents, but, at long last, once again to the Japanese people. One of their first efforts involved translating the New Testament,

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20. Ortega y Gasset, "The Misery and the Splendor of Translation," 102–3, emphasis added.

21. Ōno Susumu, one of the most renowned linguists of modern Japan, in his book *Nihonjin no kami* (Tokyo: Shinchō Bunko, 1997), cites on page 117 the entry from the 1595 Latin-Portuguese-Japanese dictionary (*Ra-Po-Nichi Jisho*) defining Deus as "Tenshin" (heavenly deity), "Tentei" (emperor of heaven), and "Tenshu" (heavenly lord).

then the Old Testament, into Japanese. They made the reasonable decision to draw upon the Bible translations that had earlier been done by missionaries in China. Amid the debates over the proper Chinese term for the Christian God, two American missionaries, W. J. Boone and W. M. Lowrie, hit upon the Chinese character *shen* 神 (pronounced *shin* in the Japanese approximation of Chinese pronunciation used for character compounds; pronounced *kami* in the native Japanese reading of the character). Though a number of other missionaries mounted sound arguments against the use of this word, a complete Bible translation was published in China in 1859 employing *shen* as the term for deity. The original meaning of this Chinese character is along the lines of: "the incomprehensible power of Nature as manifested in phenomena such as lightning."[22]

When J. C. Hepburn and S. R. Brown undertook the first complete Japanese translation of the Bible in 1872, they followed the precedent set by other American missionaries in China and used the *shen* character for God. Unfortunately, the native Japanese pronunciation of the character, *kami*, launched one of the longest-standing translation dilemmas in the history of Christian proselytizing in East Asia. Unlike the case in China, the term *kami* in Japan has, for centuries, been associated with the indigenous animistic deities of Shinto and was broadened to subsume the Buddhist gods that subsequently arrived on Japanese soil.[23] This can hardly be considered a significant improvement over Xavier's use of *Dainichi.*

Subsequently, an attempt—to my mind, a rather feeble one—was made to distinguish the Christian God from the pantheon of divinities that were central to the comingled Shinto and Buddhist traditions. And how was this done? By taking the term *kami* and adding an honorific ending on it! The *kami* became *kamisama* 神様; but nothing is solved by adding an honorific suffix to a native term that, to the Japanese mind, denotes "a superior and mysterious force of either creative or destructive character, which resides in natural elements, animals, and certain human beings, causes ambivalent feelings of fear and gratitude, and is the focus of ritual behavior."[24]

I am more than willing to concede Professor Takagi's assertion that it is the responsibility of the members of a faith to educate investigators and new converts as to the specific meanings of the core vocabulary of their dogma.

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22. See, for instance, the description of the character's meaning in the *Shinjigen,* ed. Ogawa Kanki, Nishida Taichirō, and Akazuka Tadashi (Tokyo: Kadokawa Shoten, 1975), 720.

23. See Ōno, *Nihonjin no kami,* 115–23.

24. Definition taken from *Kodansha Encyclopedia,* 4:125. *Kamisama* is the Japanese term used today in the LDS Church in Japan.

But there remains, like a thorn in our sides, the post-Eden, post-Babel quandary: any such education must be done using the elusive medium of words, the interpretation of which might lead to different meanings in different languages. I am convinced that inventing a completely foreign terminology and then trying to force new meanings on it by using the bludgeon of language is bound to lead to confusion, frustration, and, ultimately, the breakdown of communication. I am quite certain that tortured translations must bear some responsibility for the fact that some Japanese Christians today can blithely and proudly declare that their God happens to be the greatest of all among the Shinto and Buddhist deities that proliferate across the land.

Babelesque confusion over how to name God in Japanese was not the only challenge that confronted the first Christian missionaries in the sixteenth century. For some time they used *Jōdo* 浄土 for paradise or heaven; it is the term used in Pure Land Buddhism to indicate the "Western Paradise of the Amida Buddha." In some documents, the Christian faith is referred to as *Buppō* 仏法, which quite clearly means the "Law of the Buddha." The Catholic concept of man's "spirit" was originally translated with an existing Japanese term, *tamashii* 魂, which was already recognized from primitive Shinto animistic belief as the spiritual essence that makes up the omnipresent *kami*. *Sō* 僧, the word for a Buddhist priest, was also applied to the Portuguese padres, and when they received permission from the Japanese government to build churches, they were called *tera* 寺, or Buddhist temples; the most famous of these was erected in Kyoto in 1578 and was named by the foreigners the Church of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary. But by the Japanese, both converts and non-Christians alike, it was called the *Nambanji* 南蛮寺 (the Buddhist Temple of the Southern[25] Barbarians).[26]

I could cite many other examples, but I believe these few make the point: The attempt to adopt existing Japanese religious terms and to somehow "convert" them into Christian vocabulary was problematic at best. It is difficult to imagine how such an approach could bear fruit in any culture of any age. By 1555, Father Baltasar Gago felt compelled to pen a letter stating:

> These [Buddhist] Japanese have a number of words which they use in their sects. For a long time we preached them the truth through the medium of these words. Once I had become aware of them, however, I changed them

25. "Southern" because they had entered Japan through Kagoshima, at the southern tip of Kyushu.

26. Most of these examples are cited in Stefan Kaiser, "Translations of Christian Terminology into Japanese, 16–19th Centuries: Problems and Solutions," in *Japan and Christianity: Impacts and Responses,* ed. John Breen and Mark Williams (London: Macmillan, 1996), 8–29. Additional examples may be found in Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan*, especially chapters 1–3.

> immediately because, if one wishes to treat the truth with words of error and lies, they impart the wrong meaning. For all words, therefore, which I realised to be damaging, I teach them our own words. Even just the things that are new require new words. Besides, theirs have in essence very different meanings from what we mean.[27]

By "our words," Gago of course meant either Latin or Portuguese.[28] Which leads me to my second category:

2. Attempts at "translating" Christian religious vocabulary by using foreign terms

This is a practice born out of desperation over finding any proper Japanese equivalents. I have to use the word "translating" rather loosely, since the mere act of pronouncing a foreign word with Japanese sounds does not mean that the word can be instantly understood. Since I speak Japanese, it is not particularly difficult for me to use Japanese pronunciation when saying, for instance, *fe-su*. But am I talking about "face" or "faith"?[29] Either way, I am not likely to be communicating any unambiguously true content to a native Japanese listener.

The result of merely pronouncing European religious terms in Japanese was, to my mind, an incomprehensible torrent of "Babel sounds," something that even a highly educated Japanese person of the time must have found utterly baffling. To illustrate how much mishmash might be created when foreign terms are introduced without proper elaboration, I provide here an English translation of one passage from the catechism used in the late sixteenth century in Japan, substituting Japanese words every time a Latin or Portuguese term appears: "The sixth *hiseki* is called *jokai*. With

27. Kaiser, "Translations," 10.

28. It could be argued that the Latin and Portuguese terminology Gago was teaching to the Japanese may have suffered from the same shortcomings as the Japanese terms he rejected, since the individual books in his own Bible had not been written initially in either of those languages, but in Hebrew, Greek, or perhaps Aramaic. In essence, translating the Old Testament from Hebrew into Latin in the early centuries of the Christian era may have created a dilemma similar to the one I am describing, since the Romans had their own pantheon of gods and a pagan religious tradition quite unlike the monotheistic, messianic beliefs of the Jews and early Christians.

29. I actually heard an interesting misinterpretation involving this word at the first area conference of the Church in Japan, held in the summer of 1975. In his concluding remarks on the second day of the conference, President Spencer W. Kimball said, "I pray that you will not lose your faith." The interpreter, a Japanese brother who had done an extraordinary job throughout the sessions, was probably a bit weary by this point, and what he heard, and how he translated it into Japanese, was "I pray that you will not lose face."

this *hiseki* a *shisai* gives one the rank of *seishokusha* who administers the *hiseki*. It is the *hiseki* through which the Lord *Iesu Kirisuto* offered *onkei* to those who receive the *hiseki* so that they will be able to perform their roles well."[30] This passage "explains" the sixth Catholic sacrament, that of ordination. But how is it possible that such a statement could have made any sense to a sixteenth-century Japanese who had never even heard of Christianity?

The problem of trying to import foreign religious vocabulary into Japan and have the people somehow conjure up, intuit, or receive inspiration on what the terms might mean has not been solely a premodern Catholic challenge. Right up to the present day, no matter what brand of Christianity we name, the attempt to find just the "right word" to convey a religious concept has led many fine, earnest translators to throw up their hands and, in a fit of despondency, merely use the foreign word in Japanese pronunciation, hoping that a glossary or a concordance or a patient bilingual minister can somehow offer an explanation of sufficient meatiness that it will cling to the bare linguistic bones.

Again, I shall cite only a handful of examples. We may as well begin—at the end this time—with *A-men* アーメン. *Pan* パン, from the Portuguese, is still used in Japanese to describe bread, including the sacramental bread. Then there are *suteeku* ステーク and *waado* ワード, *baputesuma* バプテスマ and *endaumento* エンダウメント, and *bishoppu* ビショップ.[31] Curious, isn't it, that two of the most important ordinances for salvation and exaltation do not seem to have adequate Japanese equivalents? The faithful Protestant translators of the late nineteenth century, who were the first to render the complete New Testament in Japanese, had to take a vote among fifty-five foreign missionaries in Japan to determine whether to use *senrei* 洗礼 (the ordinance of washing) or *baputesuma* to describe the ordinance that cleanses the sins of the penitent. The final vote was sixteen for *senrei*, thirty for *baputesuma,* and nine abstentions (presumably all of them unrepentant). One Baptist minister resigned from the translation committee after the vote was taken, and in his own subsequent translation of the New Testament, he coined the term *shinrei* 浸礼, meaning "baptism by immersion."[32] Latter-day Saints in Japan today use *baputesuma.*

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30. Adapted from Higashibaba, *Christianity in Early Modern Japan,* 171.

31. These are, of course, respectively "stake" and "ward," "baptism" and "endowment," and "bishop." In 2009, the Church in Japan ceased official use of the Japanese position title, *kantoku* 監督—which has a core meaning of "supervisor" or "coach" in common usage but has also been used to denote a Christian ecclesiastical leader—in favor of the English loan word *bishoppu*. A hypothetical Brother Tanaka, who would once have been called "Tanaka Kantoku," is now addressed as "Tanaka Bishoppu."

32. Bernardin Schneider, "Bible Translations," in *Handbook of Christianity in Japan,* ed. Mark R. Mullins (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 209–10.

The use of what linguists refer to as "borrowed words" or "loan words" is, of course, a common phenomenon in any language whose speakers have had ongoing interaction with those speaking a different tongue. But the overarching problem with using loan words to render Christian terminology into Japanese has to do with issues involving both the eye and the ear—and, ultimately, the heart. Words imported into Japanese from other languages (as is the case with the religious terms cited in the previous paragraph) are generally written in *katakana,* a phonetic syllabary that has, in modern times, been reserved almost solely for "foreign" words. It is as though the words were both italicized ***and*** bold-faced to point out to the Japanese just how alien they are. They stand out like sore thumbs in a normal Japanese sentence. And, of course, they sound peculiar to the Japanese ear unfamiliar with the words. In a nation such as Japan—which for centuries preserved its national, ethnic, racial, political, and social structures separate from those of the outside world, and which takes a great deal of pride in what its people see as their "uniqueness" in all the world—using foreign terms to describe something as intimate and personal and close to the heart as religious beliefs builds up an enormous barrier before the core doctrines can even be taught. Up to the present day, Christianity is perceived in Japan as a foreign religion suited to foreigners but unjapanizable and therefore not necessary or even desirable to the Japanese. And language is one of the chief offenders in marking Christianity as an invasive, imperialistic ideology that the Japanese seem to feel very happy being without. After all, despite nearly 250 years of active proselytizing by various Christian sects in Japan, at present perhaps only 1 to 2 percent of the population claims to be Christian.[33] Christianity is,

33. Different sources give different totals. "There is no clear census on the exact number of Christians, according to the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, which monitors religious activity. The Christian community itself counts only those who have been baptized and are currently regular churchgoers—some 1 million people, or less than 1 percent of the population, according to Nobuhisa Yamakita, moderator of the United Church of Christ in Japan." Mariko Kato, "Christianity's Long History in the Margins," *The Japanese Times Online,* February 24, 2009, http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/nn20090224i1.html. "The Agency for Cultural Affairs reported in 2006 that membership claims by religious groups totaled 209 million persons. This number, which is nearly twice the country's population, reflects many citizens' affiliation with multiple religions. For example, it is very common for Japanese to practice both Buddhist and Shinto rites. According to the Agency's annual yearbook, 107 million persons identify themselves as Shinto, 89 million as Buddhist, 3 million as Christian." United States Department of State, "2009 Report on International Religious Freedom—Japan," October 26, 2009, available at the UN Refugee Agency, *Refworld,* http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4ae86131a5.html. In a country of 127.6 million in 2006, 3 million

to many Japanese, what raw fish is to many Americans—alien, slippery, a bit hard to swallow, and not something they want to make a part of their daily diet. And at least some of the reason for that lies in the difficulty Christians have had coming up with palatable terminology to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ in ways that it can be "delicious to [them]" (see Alma 32:28).

3. Words, phrases, or grammatical expressions that can easily be misinterpreted, or interpreted in multiple and sometimes contradictory ways

My examples here will be drawn from the Japanese language triple combination currently in use in the Church, which, though revised in 2009, is based on translations done in 1995 by a devoted committee of Japanese translators who were commissioned to produce as "literal" a translation as they could possibly manage.[34] One of the most useful features of this new edition of Latter-day Saint scriptures in Japanese is the addition of "The Guide to the Scriptures"—"Seiku Gaido" 聖句ガイド at the end of the volume. Surely this vital supplement goes a long way toward meeting Professor Takagi's requirement for Japanese Saints to be "educated" as to the doctrinal meaning of the vocabulary that has been chosen to render religious terms. But I would argue that the unavoidable reality that these educational entries have to be written in human language can, on occasion, actually just compound the problem of properly communicating spiritual truths. For example, in the entry under *Ten no on-chichi* 天の御父, meaning "Heavenly Father"

Christians translates into 2.35 percent, but this number could include many people who practice more than one religion. Of course, Latter-day Saints make up only a small part of this already small Christian total, whatever it is. With just over 124,000 members, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints accounts for less than .1 percent of Japan's population.

34. I assume that "literal" means that the translators must be careful not to introduce what the Apostle Peter called "private interpretation" (2 Pet. 1:20) into scriptural passages. Bellos, describing the translation philosophy of Eugene Nida, whom he calls "the most respected authority on Bible translation in the world," says that Nida "was an unabashed proponent of the view that, as far as the Bible was concerned, only dynamic equivalence ['where the translator substitutes for source-text expressions other ways of saying things with roughly the same force in the culture of the receiving society'] would do. In that sense he was renewing the translator's defense of the right to be free and not 'literal.' Nida's overriding concern . . . is that the holy scriptures be brought to all people—and that what is brought to them be the scriptures, as nearly as can be managed. A Bible that makes no immediate sense in the target language, or Bibles that can be read or understood only by trained theologians or priests, are not well suited to missionaries' aims." Bellos, *Is That a Fish in Your Ear?*, 170–71. This is not to say that Nida's overriding concern is the only interest in need of attention.

or "Father in Heaven," we read this very simple definition: "Zenjinrui no rei no chichi 全人類の霊の父." On the surface, this is a straightforward definition that means "The father of the spirits of all mankind." Now, what could possibly be wrong with that from a doctrinal point of view? It is most assuredly true. But those conspiracy theorists who insist that Japanese is a vague language, a language of often deliberate obfuscation,[35] might gleefully point to a basic grammatical principle that somewhat muddies the waters here. The connective particle *no*, used twice in this short phrase, often signifies a modifier, as in *zenjinrui no rei*—"the father of spirits." But the elusive *no* can also be a grammatical substitute for *de aru*, the copula that means "who is." So this phrase could be taken to mean "the father of all mankind, who is a spirit."

"The Only Begotten of the Father" is another vital doctrinal concept that has a unique and ennobling meaning for Latter-day Saints. The Protestant translation of the term, as in John 3:16, merely says, "hitori-go 独り子"—the "only child" or, possibly, "only Son" of the Father. It loses all sense of begetting, except in the implicit understanding that "a son is the child of his father," but it seems to me to lose a good deal of the metaphorical as well as literal power of the word "begotten." Here, too, the translators of Latter-day scripture have followed the precedent set by the sectarian translation of the Bible into Japanese, leaving something of a barrier to a Japanese person's attempts to understand through the scriptures the full nature of the relationship between the Father and the Son.

Another path I must travel down in this study is the use of the word *michi* 道, which has a multitude of meanings, the most common of which are "road/path" and "way." Thus, for example, when the Savior describes himself as "the way, the truth, and the life," the Japanese term for "way" is

35. There is a highly nuanced debate, both among linguists and the Japanese public, over whether the Japanese language is better at imprecise utterances than other languages. Some of the best references in support of "vagueness" (or "indirectness") as one of the characteristics of the Japanese language include Horikawa Naoyoshi, "Hanashikotoba ni okeru Nihonjin no ronri"「話しことばにおける日本人の論理」(The Logic of the Japanese as Demonstrated in Their Spoken Language), originally published in his book, *Nihonjin no seikaku*「日本人の性格」(The Personality of the Japanese), published by Asakura Shoten in 1970; it is easily accessible thanks to its inclusion in a language textbook, *Modern Japanese: An Advanced Reader*, ed. Gen Itasaka, Seiichi Makino, and Kikuko Yamashita (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1974), 8–17. The best description I have seen of a moderate view of the Japanese language's facility for indirectness comes from Jay Rubin: "The Japanese *language* can express anything it needs to, but Japanese *social norms* often require people to express themselves incompletely or indirectly." Rubin, *Gone Fishin': New Angles on Perennial Problems* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1992), 13.

michi. It is also employed in the 1909 Book of Mormon translation for "the plan," as in "the plan of salvation" or "the great plan of happiness."[36]

This Chinese character, read in Japanese as *michi*, is in the pronunciation derived from its Chinese roots read either *dō* or *tō* and is the character used to describe "the Way of the Gods" (Shintō). Perhaps even more potentially perplexing to the Asian mind is the fact that the character in Chinese is read *Dao*, as in Daoism, and as in the title of the classical text of Daoism from the sixth century BC, the *Dao De Jing* 道徳経. It is instructive, I think, to ponder the fact that the word *michi*/*dao* that is used in translating Christian scriptures into the languages of East Asia is precisely the word that appears in the opening passage of the *Dao De Jing*:

> The Way [*Dao*] that can be told of is not an unvarying way [*Dao*];
> The names that can be named are not unvarying names.
> It was from the Nameless that Heaven and Earth sprang;
> The named is but the mother that rears the ten thousand creatures, each after its kind.[37]

There is the distinct possibility that we are left with a translation of John 1:1 in Japanese that could mean something like "In the beginning was the Dao, and the Dao was with God, and the Dao was God." All we really need to do is rename it the *Dao De John*. Of course, I am not suggesting that it is likely for any intelligent reader to do such a garbled reading; my point is that the fluid changeability (the very thing the opening passage of the *Dao De Jing* proclaims) of language opens the door to a multiplicity of meanings, and that it is difficult to control how individuals choose to decode a string of words, each of which can have manifold interpretations. One can almost hear Peter shuddering each time he observes someone applying a "private interpretation" to the prophecies of scripture (2 Peter 1:20), for interpretation is unavoidable in the act of translating.

4. Terms that simply don't communicate

While it is true that as Latter-day Saints we have our own set of unique religious jargon in every language, one of the issues in a truly foreign land[38]

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36. See Takagi, "Proclaiming the Way," 30. It is most interesting, but not relevant to the current discussion, that, as Takagi notes in this article, the 1880 Japanese translation of the Bible played one of the salutary tricks of the Japanese written language in writing the character *michi* for "logos" but then glossing its reading as *kotoba*, literally meaning "word."

37. *Tao Te Ching*, trans. Arthur Waley, in Arthur Waley, *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (New York: Grove, 1958), ch. 1.

38. I might note here, lest my description of Japan as a "truly foreign land" sounds derogatory or racist, that I use it in the sense that the Japanese language has

like Japan is that some words we have decided to use in translating our beliefs into their language actually *impede* rather than foster communication. They may be archaic words that no well-educated Japanese person knows anymore or simply vocabulary describing a concept that remains so vague in their minds that they cannot comprehend it sufficiently well to embrace it in their own personal set of beliefs.

In a previous article, I dealt with the challenge of teaching the law of chastity, since the Japanese word used to translate "adultery" in the Ten Commandments and in modern-day scripture (*kan'in* 姦淫) is not a word that would ever be heard today in colloquial conversation or used in everyday written discourse. Many educated Japanese today would not even understand the characters used to write the word. It would be akin to teaching the law of chastity to an English speaker today and citing the relevant passage in Exodus as "Thou shalt not commit advowtry," a term the Oxford English Dictionary tells us survived until 1688. I wonder whether even a Japanese person of the seventeenth or nineteenth centuries would have understood the Japanese word that is still used in Christian scriptures today.

To my mind, perhaps the most painful example of inadequate translation is the Japanese term for "atonement." Granted, this is such a profound and profoundly critical doctrine for all of our Father's children that it cannot be satisfactorily explained in words alone. But of all our sacred concepts, this is the one we simply have to get right—or as close to right as possible! I suspect we have some advantages when we take the revealed doctrine of the Atonement to nations where the resident spiritual memory contains some sort of variation on the Christ archetype, and there are certainly many civilizations, ancient and modern, that claim some such variation. It is no doubt true, as James George Frazer argued in *The Golden Bough* (1890), that the myth of the Dying God belongs to a great many of the world's spiritual traditions.[39] But as C. S. Lewis argues in his critique of Frazer's thesis, Frazer

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been classified as a "truly foreign language" by many American linguists, including the late Eleanor H. Jorden.

39. James George Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A New Abridgement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998). This study of humankind's progression from magic through religion to scientific inquiry was controversial at the time of its publication because Frazer was sufficiently bold to rank Jesus in a long genealogy of "dying gods," thereby suggesting that he was merely another manifestation of a generations-old prototype. The assertion met with such opposition in Victorian England that Frazer consigned the argument to an appendix in the third edition of 1906–15, then eliminated it altogether in the final 1922 abridgement. See the "Introduction" to the Oxford edition, pp. xxiv–xxvii. The primary sections in which Frazer presents his arguments of a "dying god" archetype, including the killing of divine kings, the sacrificing of the sons of kings, and several manifestations of the

has it backwards by queuing Christ up in a long line of pagan archetypes and concluding therefrom that Jesus is merely another in the series; Lewis argues that what is unique about Christianity is that it takes the myth and makes it fact. He writes: "Does not the Christian story show this pattern of descent and re-ascent because that is part of all the nature religions of the world? We have read about it in *The Golden Bough*. We all know about Adonis, and the stories of the rest of those rather tedious people; is not this one more instance of the same thing, 'the dying God'? Well, yes it is."[40] But he goes on to say: "Now as myth transcends thought, Incarnation transcends myth. The heart of Christianity is a myth which is also a fact. The old myth of the Dying God, *without ceasing to be myth*, comes down from the heaven of legend and imagination to the earth of history. It *happens*—at a particular date, in a particular place, followed by definable historical consequences. . . . We must not be nervous about 'parallels' and 'Pagan Christs': they *ought* to be there—it would be a stumbling block if they weren't."[41] In at least the metaphorical sense, it is because of the *almost* universal existence of some version of the Christ narrative that the message of the restored gospel can strike a resonant chord in the hearts of a large portion of the world's population. Western literature is filled with examples of Christ figures that echo the wide familiarity with the paradigm: Sydney Carton in Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*, Santiago in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea,* Jim Casy in Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, Gandalf in Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings,* and of course Lewis's own creation, Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*—each of these "stand-ins" for Christ can speak across many cultural and linguistic lines.

My readings in early Japanese mythology, however, have not led me to a death-to-rebirth story therein that is a close correlate to the myths of Adonis, Osiris, or Balder, much less to the reality of Christ himself. The closest correlate I can think of is the story of the two deities, Izanagi and Izanami, who are the parents of the Japanese islands. When the goddess Izanami dies in childbirth, her husband goes, Orpheus-like, to the underworld to try to retrieve her. But, importantly, he fails—in fact, he fails spectacularly: not only does he not bring Izanami back to life, but she is so incensed at his attempt that she tries to kill him and then swears to massacre a thousand of

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scapegoat, are Book II: Killing the God (pp. 223–554 in the Oxford edition), and Book III: The Scapegoat (pp. 557–705).

40. C. S. Lewis, "The Grand Miracle," in *God in the Dock: Essays on Theology and Ethics,* ed. Walter Hooper (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1970), 83.

41. C. S. Lewis, "Myth Became Fact," in *God in the Dock,* 66–67.

his people every day. Hardly a story that will be memorialized in the annals of worldwide Christianity.

My point here is that we share so very little mythological and theological turf with the Japanese that we simply cannot blurt out one of the words used to translate atonement—*aganai/shokuzai* 購い・贖罪—and expect it to call up all manner of associations in the cultural memories of the people. Both *aganai* and *shokuzai* are dated words that mean "compensation, reparation, or indemnity" and, as a verb, "to pay money to get something out of hock" or "to purchase the contract of one who belongs to another." Note that each of these meanings relates, in one way or another, to the exchange of money. (In fact, the final meaning of buying up another person's contract most frequently refers to the early modern practice of freeing a courtesan from her indentures.) While it is true that we have all been "bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:20), as Paul puts it, and "ransomed" (see Matt. 20:28) by Christ's blood, I question whether there is any corollary in the Japanese tradition, since their narratives do not provide any types and shadows—such as Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac, or the sacrificial "lamb of God," or the image of blood painted on door posts to save the faithful from the destroying angel—that might be adopted as metaphors for Christ (see Mosiah 13:10). Likely the closest Japanese traditions come to our atonement narratives—and it is still pretty distant—is in the making of offerings to the gods to appease angry spirits, which are viewed in Shinto as the cause of all human ills. But to reduce something as supernally magnificent and loving as the Savior's willing sacrifice for all humanity to some kind of animistic act of soothing the savage breast by means of coinage is to drain it of all its essential power and beauty.[42]

Conclusion

If language is as slippery and imperfect—sometimes to the point of being deceptive—a medium of communication as I have argued here, what can be done to improve the ways in which the gospel of Jesus Christ is expressed and explicated in a language such as Japanese? It goes without saying (but I shall say it anyway) that the Translation Department of the Church is tirelessly dedicated to grappling with this issue (see sidebar on page 55), and

42. It is instructive, I think, that virtually the only word used in Japanese translations of the scriptures for "atonement"—whether in the Old Testament or New Testament senses—is the above-mentioned *aganai,* which is employed for "atonement," "ransom," and "propitiation," suggesting that the Japanese tradition does not make allowance for any subtle distinctions between these concepts. And there is no equivalent in Japanese that can match the powerful wordplay of the Anglo-Saxon "at-one-ment."

that considerable progress has been made over the years. The combination of intelligence, inspired guidance from Church leaders, and linguistic excellence represented by the Church's translation team has demonstrated time and again that the "crooked broken scattered and imperfect language" over which even the Prophet Joseph agonized can, with ongoing efforts at improvement, narrow the gap between the imperfect mortal instrument of language and the flawless voices of angels that convey the things of God.

But as marvelous a work as has been done, it is a process that must be continued, and it is unlikely to be able to declare its labors done until the Lord chooses to do whatever he will with human language when he comes to earth again. The struggle must continue.

How best, then, to respond to these challenges posed by the intricate imperfections of man-made language? Surely it is incumbent upon those of us who engage in the work of translation to continue our efforts over time to leap the hurdles of translation and propose increasingly accurate and evocative words and phrases to convey—with as little distortion as possible—the saving truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. But where to begin, if the word, as John claims, is primary? It perhaps makes sense to start with the name of God. Do we follow Xavier's example and simply japanize our word, calling him "Goddo"? I think not. That still calls up too many theologically imperialistic notions in the Japanese mind. Do we pronounce one of his non-Japanese names, such as Elohim, in Japanese fashion? Do we create a new term altogether and begin the seemingly endless chore of educating the Japanese on what we mean by it? Risky. But I would assert that the efforts to refine our religious vocabulary must continue.

I take as precedents the apparent dissatisfactions that the Prophet Joseph felt with the King James Version of the Bible, which led him to work on his own inspired translation, and, more recently, the significant labors done in the Church to produce the Spanish translation of the Bible, the *Santa Biblia,* in order to "provide Spanish-speaking members worldwide with a uniform Bible that contains study helps to enhance their understanding of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ."[43] This is a mammoth undertaking, one that certainly required several years and scores of participants to bring to

43. The LDS edition of the *Santa Biblia* "was prepared and reviewed by a team of translators, General Authorities, Area Seventies, professional linguists, and Church members . . . under the direction of the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles." The Church indicates that a quality translation (the 1909 Reina-Valera Bible), which was no longer protected by copyright, "underwent a very conservative update of outdated grammar *and vocabulary*" (emphasis added). These quotations are all taken from the webpage on the Church's official site: http://lds.org/santabiblia/q-a.html#01.

Translation in The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Tod R Harris, Manager, Scriptures Translation, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Translation is a critical part of the work of the worldwide Church, and all official translation is performed by the Church's Translation Division under the direction of presiding councils. This means that the Translation Division translates only material that is approved by these councils into languages that are also approved. Currently, there are about 180 approved languages into which the Church translates materials such as curriculum manuals, magazines, hymns, and, increasingly, software and websites.

Originating Church organizations provide English source texts to the Translation Division. These texts then undergo specialized preparation before they are sent out to mostly native-speaking translators, often residing in their native countries. This preparation includes preliminary electronic formatting (to streamline final production) as well as a function called "adaptation." This step is performed by linguists and writers who scan the text for passages that are difficult to translate, such as ones containing specialized terminology or descriptions of uniquely American cultural activities, and who write explanatory notes to assist translators in preserving the meaning of the original material. Translation project supervisors also work with translators and reviewers to help them produce translations of curriculum and other day-to-day materials that are as correct and sound as natural as possible in the respective target languages.

The Translation Division is also responsible for translating the Church's standard works, including the Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. The scriptures of the Church are translated according to a much higher standard than are other materials.

Since the time of Joseph Smith, the Church has followed a very conservative scripture translation philosophy, striving to be as literal to source texts as possible. Though the Church reveres the Bible, it recognizes that it has gone through many iterations, some more faithful to source texts than others; hence the

qualifier in Article of Faith 8 "as far as it is translated correctly." The Book of Mormon has been translated from its source language to English only once, and since the original plates are no longer available, Joseph Smith's English translation has become the de facto source text for all subsequent translations.

To facilitate the preservation of this relatively literal and therefore very accurate translation, the Book of Mormon and other scriptures are translated in accordance with a policy statement issued by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve Apostles that requires translations of the standard works to be literal translations, insofar as possible. Recognizing that it is not possible to translate all words and phrases in a literal way into every language, the Translation Division strives to produce "modified-literal" translations of scriptures in order to provide an experience for target-language readers that is very similar to the one readers of the original English text have.

The Church uses teams of native-speaking members residing in their respective countries to perform scripture translation. The work is overseen by scripture translation supervisors working out of the Church headquarters in Salt Lake City. These supervisors train translation teams to preserve the meaning of the scriptures (including key terms) as their first priority, but also assist translators to be as literal as possible within the constraints of the target language's structure. This difficult balance is achieved by using specialized translation guides and other materials prepared by Translation Division exegetes. The supervisors work constantly with the teams to assure that the proper balance between literalness and language acceptability and understandability is maintained.

When each translation of scripture is completed, it also undergoes an ecclesiastical review by a committee of native-speaking local leaders who provide a final certification that the translation is doctrinally accurate as well as acceptable to the intended audience. This certification is submitted to presiding councils who then authorize the translation to be published. Policy and processes are also in place to revise translations of scriptures as the need arises.

fruition. But since it is the God-given right of every person to "hear the fulness of the gospel in his own tongue, and in his own language" (D&C 90:11), I believe it to be a worthy investment of every necessary effort to produce a similarly revised translation of the Bible into Japanese. Until we can provide nonmembers and members alike with scriptures that are, to the extent humanly possible, free from overt doctrinal error,[44] we will have to continue with the cumbersome, seemingly endless task of twisting the definitions of existing terms to suit our—and the Lord's—purposes.

Was Bertrand Russell right after all when he said that "no one can understand the word 'cheese' unless he has a nonlinguistic acquaintance with cheese"?[45] Was the Dutch linguist Henry Schogt correct when he made the following rather gloomy pronouncement?

> Communication between two people who do not share the same native language is impossible, even if one of them has learned the language of the other. Even those who think they have learned a foreign language remain prisoners of their mother tongue's value system, and are therefore incapable of truly communicating with those whose language they think they have mastered. . . . The language one speaks focuses on elements of the outside world and creates abstract notions that other languages may leave either unnoticed or, in the case of abstract notions, unconceptualized.[46]

Only the fruits of ongoing labors by the kinds of qualified teams who produced the new LDS Spanish edition of the Bible will be able to provide the ultimate answer to that question. But if those labors continue, and similar work is done in other major languages of the Church population, I remain hopeful that we will become more and more effective in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ in lands such as Japan where culture, customs, and language are so far removed that they seem complete "strangers and foreigners." There remain many challenges in translating—or, to borrow

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44. I have written elsewhere about the translation of a term into Japanese that raises all manner of doctrinal issues. It is the translation of "natural man," as used both by Paul and by King Benjamin. Both the Japanese Bible and the most recent translation of the Book of Mormon use the phrase "umarenagara no hito 生まれながらの人," which literally means "man in the state into which he is born," as close an approximation to the false doctrine of "original sin" as I can imagine. See my "'Strange Characters and Expressions,'" 32–47.

45. Quoted by Roman Jakobson in "On Linguistic Aspects of Translation," in Schulte and Biguenet, *Theories of Translation,* 144.

46. Henry Schogt, "Semantic Theory and Translation Theory," in Schulte and Biguenet, *Theories of Translation,* 194.

Ortega's delightful word, "transubstantiating"[47]—our religious vocabulary into a language as obstreperous as Japanese. Although we have yet to arrive at the hoped-for linguistic destination, I do not for a moment believe that words are our only or even our most effective tools of communication. In fact, though our earthly tools may have dull edges and broken handles, it is, in the final analysis, not the words themselves that bring individuals to a knowledge of their Redeemer.

Can words be as much an obstacle as a medium of communication? I hope I have demonstrated here that they can—and that we as the people commissioned to take the gospel to every nation, kindred, tongue, and people have a solemn, inescapable responsibility to keep searching for the right words, to improve our translations and enhance our abilities to explain saving truth in terms that communicate as well as is humanly possible.

The ultimate, simple, and highly unoriginal—but true—conclusion to which I can come is that *after all we can do* to come up with the best possible language to teach the gospel, it is by the grace of God (see 2 Ne. 25:23) that our language is saved. That is, with the convincing power of his Spirit in the teaching process, we can and will succeed in our imperfect but imperative attempts. I turn again to the Apostle Paul:

> But as it is written, *Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man,* the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.
>
> But God hath revealed *them* unto us by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.
>
> For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.
>
> Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; *that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God*.
>
> Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but *which the Holy Ghost teacheth*; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.
>
> But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Cor. 2:9–14, emphasis added)

And, again, in Doctrine and Covenants 50:21–2: "He that receiveth the word by the Spirit of truth receiveth it as it is preached by the Spirit of

47. Ironically, this "delightful" word does not come directly from Ortega (who used "transustanciación"), but from his capable translator, Elizabeth Gamble Miller.

truth. . . . Wherefore, he that preacheth and he that receiveth, understand one another, and both are edified and rejoice together."

The Spirit *will* give utterance, and will, in yet another of the endless manifestations of the tender mercies that always accompany the fruits of the Atonement, fill in all the linguistic gaps that are left once we have done the very best we can to put into words the unspeakable gifts that are ours through the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. Of that I am, and not through words alone, absolutely certain.

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