



Robert J. Matthews, c. 1984

Courtesy of Robert J. Matthews

# Teacher, Scholar, Administrator: A Conversation with Robert J. Matthews

*Interview by Alexander L. Baugh*

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Sometime ago, while I was conversing with a retired BYU religion faculty member, we began talking about Robert J. Matthews. Our discussion soon focused on what he had done in terms of Religious Education, BYU, and the Church. This colleague said something very interesting: “Robert Matthews will go down as one of the greatest gospel scholars this Church has ever produced, and BYU produced him!” “How true!” I replied, knowing exactly what he meant. Another former colleague of his told me, “Robert Matthews’s painstaking research on the Joseph Smith Translation [JST] helped Church leaders and Latter-day Saint scholars recognize just how important the JST was in the Restoration. If it were not for Robert Matthews, the LDS version of the King James Bible would not have a JST footnote or endnote in it!” Finally, I asked one of Brother Matthews’s dearest and closest friends how he would characterize him. Without hesitation, this friend, paraphrasing Mormon’s assessment of Captain Moroni, said, “If all men had been, and were, and ever would be, like unto Robert Matthews, behold, the very powers of hell would be shaken forever.”

Such statements are typical of the feelings Latter-day Saints everywhere have for this great yet humble teacher, scholar, administrator, and Church leader. Although small in stature, Robert J. Matthews stands tall in the eyes of those who have recognized and appreciated his scholarly contributions and who have enjoyed his friendship and collegiality—General Authorities, BYU officials, department colleagues (many of whom consider him their mentor), CES personnel, and literally thousands of students whom he has taught over the course of four decades.

In 1994, following a forty-year career in the Church Educational System and Religious Education at BYU (1955–94), Robert J. Matthews officially retired. His service in CES included teaching seminary in Soda Springs, Idaho, and institute in southern California before serving as a researcher, course writer, and editor, in the CES Central Office. In 1971 he received a university appointment in the Department of Ancient Scripture at BYU, where he remained for the next twenty-four years. From 1981 to 1991, he also served as dean of Religious Education at BYU. In the Church, Brother Matthews served for twenty-five years on the Church Correlation and Evaluation Committee, in addition to serving as a bishop, stake president, and patriarch.

Although it has been ten years since his retirement, Brother Matthews continues to lead an active life. From 1996 to 1999, he served as the first president of the Mount Timpanogos Temple, along with his wife, Shirley, who served as temple matron. He maintains an office in the Joseph Smith Building and continues to research and write. He also teaches from time to time—conducting seminars, teaching an occasional class, participating in symposia, and guest lecturing for BYU Education Week.

In the following interview, conducted on November 21, 2003, Brother Matthews provided glimpses into his early years that illustrate how he received his testimony of the restored gospel. In addition, he shared details regarding several life-changing events that shaped his gospel thinking and led him to seek a career in Church education and later to pursue a lifelong investigation and study of the Joseph Smith Translation. Also of interest to readers will be his experience on the Church's Scripture Publication Committee, his role as a senior editor of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, his feelings about his accomplishments as dean of Religious Education, and his personal philosophy regarding religious education in general.

**Baugh:** Share with us some of the memories you have of your parents and family and what it was like growing up in Evanston, Wyoming, in the 1930s and 1940s.

**Matthews:** I was born in Evanston. I was the youngest of eight children. There was a twenty-year stretch between the first one and the last one. My parents were both from England. They met in Salt Lake City after their families came to Utah. Five of my brothers and my sister were born in Salt Lake, but my family moved to Evanston and had a little farm, and then one more brother and I came along. So I had the benefit of some very fine older brothers and one sister, and they were very

good to me; as I look back on my growing-up years, they were good examples. They were good members of the Church and good citizens, some of them held public office, and there was a time when we all lived on one street. I had the benefit in terms of a large and faithful family.

One other thing I might mention about Evanston is that it's not necessarily a Latter-day Saint community. My friends were Catholics, Baptists, Methodists, Presbyterians, and Episcopalians, and I got an insight into other churches. I often visited those other churches, and we had gospel conversations. I lived across the street from the Catholic church for many years, so I had a firsthand acquaintance with the beliefs of other churches; most of my friends were from them, so it was a multireligious experience.

*Baugh:* Are any of your siblings still alive?

*Matthews:* I have one brother—the brother just older than I, six years older—he's still alive, and we keep in contact. He lives in Ogden.

*Baugh:* Did you have any particularly meaningful, life-changing, or spiritual experiences during your early years that impacted your life?

*Matthews:* I don't remember any unusual experiences. After I was a teenager, I did have an experience that has to do with the Joseph Smith Translation. I think we'll mention that a little later when we come to how I got interested in the JST. It was a spiritual experience, and it has remained with me throughout my life.

I did a lot of farmwork and construction work as a boy. There were accidents from time to time, and my life was spared. I thought nothing particularly unusual about it at the time, other than I stayed alive, but there were some accidents—runaway horses and accidents with machinery where I could easily have been killed. As I look back now, I'm very glad my life was spared. Otherwise the kind of things I've done, particularly with the scriptures, might not have been done until much later. That's about as much as I could mention.

I did have an invitation to go up for an airplane ride. I was seventeen, and a very good friend of mine was the pilot, and he said, "Let's go next Sunday morning." I knew I shouldn't be out flying Sunday morning. We worked together in a garage, and all week long he would talk about how on Sunday morning we were going for a ride. Saturday night as I left for home, he said, "I'll see you in the morning?" and I said, "No." He looked very disappointed. I felt so bad. But the next morning I went to priesthood meeting, and I saw the airplane flying up above. Airplanes were very scarce in Evanston in those days, so I knew

this was the plane. And as I came out of church, my sister-in-law said to me, “There’s been an accident.” I asked about the pilot, and she said, “Oh, he’s all right, but the passenger that he had with him was killed.” I don’t know if that plane would have crashed if I had been in it, but I do believe that may be the most important priesthood meeting I ever attended.

*Baugh:* Who were some individuals in your early years who had a strong influence in your life?

*Matthews:* Well, definitely my parents. My father and mother were both active in the Church, and not just mildly active. My father was a student of the scriptures, and my mother knew and loved the scriptures, especially the Book of Mormon. There never was a big display about it, but it was always characteristic of our home that we had the scriptures, and we talked about them and read them. We discussed the Prophet Joseph Smith and Presidents Brigham Young and Heber C. Kimball and John Taylor. That was a daily experience in our home. So my parents were a very strong influence, as were my older brothers and my sister.

*Baugh:* For many young men, serving a mission establishes the spiritual foundation for their future. You served in the California Mission in 1946–47 under President Oscar W. McConkie Sr. What were a few of the highlights of your missionary service?

*Matthews:* I’ve often thought about what a great experience it was for a young man, just barely nineteen, to come under the influence of such a great spiritual giant as Oscar W. McConkie. And he was a spiritual giant. To be around him for the length of a mission and hear his testimony was simply wonderful. He would utter prophecies, and he would preach and expound. I often thought that it was just like having Alma or Nephi for a mission president, and I’m sure that experience established in me a spiritual base that I hope I’ve always kept.

*Baugh:* Talk about some of your experiences as an undergraduate at BYU and about meeting your wife, Shirley.

*Matthews:* During my first year as an undergraduate at BYU, I was not much of a scholar. I went on a mission, and when I came back, I didn’t attend the whole year like most students do. I was living in Evanston. I worked part time and would come down during the winter quarter. I took a lot of home-study courses. I completed almost an entire year by home study and had an intense interest in geography. At

first, I thought I wanted to study something along the lines of geography. However, my mission president was an attorney, so for the first two or three years after my mission, I thought I ought to be an attorney. But I gave that up, and after a while I thought I would like to be a geography teacher, so it was my ambition to get a teaching certificate and teach geography and history.

I did not meet my wife at BYU. She returned from a mission to Texas and came to Evanston to work. She worked in the hospital, and that's where I met her. We were both returned missionaries of marriageable age, and we were married in the Salt Lake Temple. We lived in Evanston for a year after we were married. She stayed and worked in Evanston teaching in the public schools and lived with my mother, who was then a widow, and I came to BYU for the last year and a half to complete my bachelor's degree. I was a very good student then and went home every weekend.

*Baugh:* Who performed your marriage?

*Matthews:* We were married by the president of the temple, ElRay L. Christiansen, who had once been the president of the Logan Temple.

*Baugh:* Tell about how you came to be employed in the Church Educational System [CES].

*Matthews:* In my last year at school, I was majoring in education with a composite major in political science, history, and geography. I had spoken seriously with the superintendent of schools in Rich County, Utah, about teaching there after I graduated. We hadn't signed anything, but we had talked favorably, and we were in the same stake. One day when I was at summer school at BYU, I met a former missionary companion, and he was just aglow. We had gotten along beautifully as missionaries, but he had not always been aglow. That day he was just sparkling. I said to him, "What's new in your life?" He said, "I've been teaching seminary for a year, and it's wonderful!" Since it was summer school, my wife was with me, and I invited him home for dinner, and he sat and told me about what it was like teaching seminary. The next day I went over to the seminary office on campus and asked for a job, and I got it. So he's the one responsible for me getting in the Church Educational System.

*Baugh:* Do you remember his name?

*Matthews:* Oh yes, his name was Kirk Moffatt Curtis, and he was from Orangeville, Utah.

*Baugh:* Did he have a long career in Church education?

*Matthews:* No, he had only about a year and a half. He was not married, and you had to be married to stay in the Church seminary system, so they let him go. [laughs]

*Baugh:* You spent from 1955 to 1971 in the Church Educational System in seminaries and institutes and the last seven years of that time as an administrator. Discuss some aspects and highlights of your career in CES.

*Matthews:* Well, my first assignment as a seminary teacher was in Soda Springs, Idaho, which was a marvelous experience. I loved it. It was great. It was wonderful. I met people there, not only the students but also the townspeople, who were very gracious to my wife and to me and who were great examples of Latter-day Saints. I still correspond with many students that I had then. After that I was transferred to southern California to teach in the institute program there under the direction of Paul H. Dunn—he was not a General Authority at that time—and we were there a couple of years and then transferred to Provo, where I worked in the central office as an editor, course writer, and researcher for the next seven years. I was seven years in Idaho, two years in California, and seven years in the central office. While it was great to work in the central office, and there were some very marvelous people there—William E. Berrett, Dale T. Tingey, Alma P. Burton, and Frank D. Day—my heart was in teaching. Ellis Rasmussen called me one day from the Joseph Smith Building and said, “Dr. Sperry is retiring, and that leaves an opening. Would you be interested?” I had just completed my doctorate and I said, “Yes, I would be interested.” So I was hired at BYU in Religious Instruction.

*Baugh:* And that was in 1971?

*Matthews:* That is correct. That’s the same year that Dallin H. Oaks became president of BYU.

*Baugh:* How did you develop such a great love for the scriptures?

*Matthews:* Well, I don’t know; it was just always there. I suppose my parents had something to do with that. We talked scriptures in the morning, we talked scriptures at mealtime, we talked scriptures at night. I suppose it was a natural thing, and my parents had certainly fostered it, although not directly. And having two years under the leadership of Oscar W. McConkie surely encouraged it. He used to say

to me, “Somebody in your ward or stake is going to know more about the gospel than anybody else, and it might just as well be you.” I don’t know how many people he told that to, but it was a powerful influence on me. I think it was just a natural thing. The scriptures appealed to my thinking. I was not interested in knowing more than anyone else—I just wanted to keep up.

**Baugh:** What books, outside the scriptures, have been the most important books to you and have shaped your understanding of the gospel and your theological framework?

**Matthews:** One nonreligious book that I read as part of the home-study assignment was *The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, which impressed me greatly. Franklin’s wit and wisdom and good judgment have been a guide to me all my life. Another book that I read as part of that course was *The Life of Thomas Jefferson*. Those two books wielded a great influence on me. I still have the two books. I frequently look things up in them.

As for religious books besides the scriptures that have influenced me, I think I would have to say the first was *The Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith. I think that book has had a greater influence than any other book except for the scriptures. Also, Joseph Fielding Smith wrote the books *The Way to Perfection* and *The Progress of Man*. He wrote other books, but because I read these early in life—I read them in my twenties—they shaped my doctrinal thinking. I am grateful those books came into my life at an early age.

**Baugh:** Both your master’s and PhD work focused on the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. How did you become interested in the JST?

**Matthews:** As I mentioned, I grew up in a religious home, and my parents were great admirers of the Prophet Joseph Smith. But I never heard one word about Joseph Smith’s translation of the Bible. I didn’t know he made one. One day during the summer after graduating from high school, I was sitting in the living room with my father and mother—I was the last one at home—and we were listening to Joseph Fielding Smith, who was giving a lecture over the radio on a Sunday evening. And in that lecture, speaking about the Godhead, he quoted John 1:18, “No man hath seen God at any time.” And then he said, “Now, that’s not translated correctly.” He said, “Joseph Smith in a revelation was told how it should read.” When Elder Smith said the word “revelation,” that just sank right into my soul. If he had said any other

word, it would not have had the same effect, but when he said that Joseph Smith by revelation received that passage in different wording, that struck me. It penetrated me. I can tell you the day, it was July 9, 1944. The reason I remember the date is because that series of lectures was published in a book called *The Restoration of All Things*. After it was published, I looked up that particular lecture to see what day it was given. That was the day I first learned there was a Joseph Smith Translation, at least that he had made a translation. But it was that feeling, and that feeling has never left me. And all through the years—I think about it frequently, though not every day—that impression has risen to the surface within me. I never said anything to my father or mother about it—not ever—I don't think I ever did mention it, but I can date my interest in the JST to the talk by Joseph Fielding Smith and the word "revelation." I think that is important for this reason too: it gave me, at the very beginning, a particular point of view of what Joseph Smith was doing. He wasn't making the translation out of curiosity, and he wasn't doing it according to his own wisdom or judgment, but he did it by revelation.

**Baugh:** Do you recall Joseph Fielding Smith even mentioning the word *translation* to make you more aware that he indeed made a translation?

**Matthews:** No, I don't think so. I think he just said, "Joseph Smith in a revelation was told that that was not a correct verse." And then he read the passage as it occurs in the JST. That was in the summer after I graduated from high school. That fall I came to BYU, and I talked to Sidney B. Sperry about it and asked him if he knew anything about Joseph Smith translating the Bible, and he said he did. But nobody knew very much about it, and most of those who had heard about it said, "We don't believe in it. We don't trust it. He didn't do much anyway." Everyone was downplaying it. Brother Sperry did not downplay it, but nobody knew anything about it. But I had that drive within me, and that's what eventually led me to contact the Reorganized [RLDS] Church to see if I could see the original manuscripts, because the popular view was that the Reorganized Church had changed it. I didn't have to be converted to the idea of Joseph Smith doing the work. I was converted to it. I just had to find evidence so I could teach other people about it. Whenever I would quote from the Joseph Smith Translation, they'd say, "You can't trust that. The Reorganized Church has changed it." I knew I had to see the original manuscript. When I wrote and asked, they told me no. It was a process of fifteen

years from the time I first asked until they let me go there and see the original documents.

*Baugh:* When did you come to the conclusion that more needed to be known about the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible?

*Matthews:* Hindsight is sometimes more clear than foresight. I never did have a feeling that I was going to have a message for the world. What was happening was that I had a very personal interest that would not go away. There was a man, N. B. Lundwall, who wrote a lot of books in the Church and compiled a lot of materials. Brother Lundwall talked occasionally in his books about the Joseph Smith Translation, so I wrote him a letter and asked him about it. He lived in Salt Lake. At this time I had returned from my mission and was a student at BYU. He told me something I had not known, and that was that he was a convert from the RLDS Church. He said, "I can get you a copy." Neither Deseret Book nor anybody else would ever have handled an Inspired Version [the name of the JST published by the RLDS Church] of the Bible in those days. He said, "I can get you a copy from my friends in Independence." So he got me my first copy of the Inspired Version of the Bible, and I went through it. Again, I think you could call it a thirst. I had a thirst for knowledge about the JST, so I read the entire King James Version [KJV] and the entire Joseph Smith Translation. Having both books open before me on the table, I would read a sentence from one and then the corresponding sentence from the other and then mark the differences. It took some years to do that, but eventually I went through the entire JST and compared every word to the KJV. I was impressed with the clarity and the contribution that Joseph Smith was making to understanding the Bible. I'd mention that to people and they'd say, "Oh, well, you can't trust that." So I knew I had to contact the Reorganized Church and see the manuscript.

*Baugh:* For many years Latter-day Saint scholars had difficulty conducting research in Independence at the RLDS [now the Community of Christ] Archives. What was your relationship with the RLDS officials and leaders?

*Matthews:* As I've indicated, for many years they would not let me see the original manuscript. But they had a change of personnel, and sometimes that makes a big difference in any organization. The former historian had passed away, and a new man came in, Richard P. Howard. He had different views. He had a master's degree in history from Berkeley, and when I wrote to him and asked if I could come, he said

yes. I thought, “He probably doesn’t understand,” so I called him on the phone and he said, “I know what you mean, and if you want to come we’ll let you see it.” He said, “You can see hard copies.” That’s the first time I ever heard that term.

I was scheduled for a speaking tour with BYU throughout the Midwest, and on June 20, 1968, I was scheduled to be in Kansas City. So I said, “I’ll be there at eight in the morning, on the 20th of June.” I spent that whole day in the RLDS library. They showed me the marked Bible. They also brought out a photocopy of the manuscript and wanted me to read that, and I said, “I’d like to see the original.” He said, “No, everything on the original is here,” so on that first visit all I saw was the photographic copy. I made subsequent visits, and from time to time I’d say, “You know there is a word here that isn’t clear; we need to look at the original.” Richard Howard was very accommodating. As time went on, he let me work directly from the original, and I didn’t have to use the photocopies. They also let me copy all of the marks out of Joseph Smith’s Bible into one of my copies of the King James Bible. The King James Bible that Joseph Smith used had a lot of marks that had no words of revision, but it had indications as to what verses should be corrected and where in the verse the correction needed to occur. So it was very, very helpful.

As for my relationship with the RLDS officials and leaders, they were all very gracious to me. They were a little formal at first because they didn’t know what a “Utah Mormon” looked like. But as we became better acquainted, they were more free and open with me. I was very polite. I did not try to convert them, but they frequently asked me questions about things, and I was always happy to answer. It was a congenial working relationship. I made many visits there, and I never made a surprise visit. I’d always either write or call and say, “I’d like to come on such and such a day and stay a week; is that all right?” And they always said yes. I treated them with the respect they deserved. After all, it was their library, and I was there at their good pleasure. They reciprocated with kindness to me. My first visit, as I’ve indicated, was June 20, 1968. I went back again in August and then in November, and then I didn’t go again until the next April. But from 1968 to 1974, I made thirteen visits. The first visit was one day only, but all the rest were weeks—Monday through Friday. They were very helpful to me. I would ask Richard Howard questions from time to time, and he was very knowledgeable and very helpful. I used their typewriter and copied the entire manuscript, four hundred and some pages. The pages were about 8 by 13 3/4 inches. The scribes had written right

out to the edge of the paper. They didn't waste any space. I have in my possession an entire typescript—word for word—and I made it look as much like the original as possible, line by line. When they skipped an inch or two of space, I skipped an inch or two of space. I have a large typescript of all the changes that are in the various manuscripts of the JST, plus I have a KJV in which I have copied, with their permission, all of the changes from the large King James Version that Joseph Smith had—not word changes, but indications where corrections needed to be made. I want to emphasize that all of that was done in their library, under their view, using their machine, with their permission. There was no subterfuge or anything. I was totally open with them, and they appreciated that.

*Baugh:* While Joseph Smith made literally thousands of changes, corrections, and additions to the King James text, are there one or two that you consider to be the most important or significant?

*Matthews:* That's a difficult question to answer because there are so many, and there are no trivial changes in the JST. But I have felt that anything that has to do with the doctrine of Christ, anywhere that the



Caption needed.

JST offers something about Jesus that the KJV does not have, that has to be an important passage. In the sixth chapter of the book of Moses, which of course is an excerpt from Genesis of the JST, Adam asks the

Lord, “Why is it that men must repent and be baptized in water?” And the Lord said to him, “Behold I have forgiven thee thy transgression in the Garden of Eden” [Moses 6:53]. And then it says, “Hence came the saying abroad among the people, that the Son of God hath atoned for original guilt, wherein the sins of the parents cannot be answered upon the heads of the children, for they are whole from the foundation of the world” [Moses 6:54]. Now I felt that that was an important doctrinal passage because it establishes the innocence of children and that children are not born under original sin. Then in Matthew chapter 18, Jesus is talking about little children and He says, “For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost” [Matthew 18:11]. Now this was said in the context of a discussion about little children, and Jesus said, “For the Son of Man is come to save that which was lost and to call sinners to repentance; but these little ones have no need of repentance, and I will save them” [JST, Matthew 18:11]. That’s the way the JST completes that thought so that those two passages establish beyond any dispute the teaching that little children are born innocent and clean, and they are automatically saved if they should die as little children. They are saved by the Atonement of Christ.

If those two passages had remained in the Bible through the centuries, one in the Old Testament and one in the New, then the whole doctrinal concept of the depravity of children and the necessity for baptism of little children—and it has been practiced far and wide by the Catholic Church, the Greek Orthodox Church, the Church of England, the Episcopal Church, and the Presbyterian Church—none of that would have been established if those two verses had remained in the Bible. So I feel that while all of the changes made by the Prophet Joseph Smith are important, I think this example is one of unequalled historical and doctrinal clarification. I’ll tell you one of the values of the Joseph Smith Translation—it’s like having Joseph Smith for a study companion.

**Baugh:** For many years you served on the Scriptures Publications Committee, and you had a role in the 1979 publication of the LDS edition of the King James Version of the Bible. Talk about your involvement in that publishing effort.

**Matthews:** In 1971 the Church had grown large enough and the time was right to publish our own edition of the Bible. It was made very clear by the First Presidency that it had to be the King James Version, but they were interested in developing study aids. In fact, for a long time it was called the Bible Aids Committee, but finally it was called the Scriptures Publications Committee. A committee was

selected. Elder Thomas S. Monson, who was then one of the youngest members of the Twelve, was the chairman of the committee. Other members of the committee were Elder Boyd K. Packer, Elder Bruce R. McConkie, and, for a short time, Elder Marvin J. Ashton.

The committee members spent their first year deciding what kind of study aids and helps to include, and they determined that there would be a new Bible Dictionary, a concordance (which developed into what is now known as the Topical Guide), all new chapter headings, explanations of Greek and Hebrew words, and excerpts from the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. The members of the Twelve were assisted by a large number of other people. William James Mortimer, who was Church publisher, was appointed as the secretary of that group. Ellis T. Rasmussen and Robert Patch, both from BYU, and I were asked to serve on that committee as technical advisers.

We did a lot of research and a lot of legwork, and each month we would meet with those three members of the Twelve. Elder Ashton was assigned to other places, so we met with Elder Monson, Elder Packer, and Elder McConkie and reported on what we had done since the previous meeting, and they gave us assignments for the next month. That went forward from 1971 until 1979, when the Bible was done, and then we were assigned to improve chapter headings and cross-references for the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, and the Pearl of Great Price. Altogether, we didn't get through until 1981, so it was about a ten-year project.

Sometimes people have asked me, "What was your impression of meeting once a month, sometimes more often, with three members of the Twelve over a ten-year period?" I can tell you truthfully, if I were asked to sustain them as prophets, seers, and revelators, I would want to raise both hands, not just one hand. It was a spiritual experience to watch those Brethren make decisions. They would talk among themselves briefly, but we would work diligently for thirty days and give something to them, and if there was a flaw in it, they would pick it out immediately. They had tremendous perception and insight. If it was acceptable, they would just discuss it very briefly, in a matter of ten seconds or so, and then agree to it. I saw revelation operate in those men day after day.

**Baugh:** Talk about your role in the 1992 Macmillan publication of the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*.

**Matthews:** Many people had reported to the Brethren that when they would go into a public library in a large city, a university library, or

a private library, there were generally anti-Mormon books but not very many books favorable to the Church. I had the same experience while I was teaching institute at UCLA. I went over to the UCLA library one day, and all they had was anti-Mormon books. My colleague, George A. Horton Jr., and I got some members of the Church to donate some good LDS books—*Gospel Doctrine* and other books—to put in the library so that people would have a better choice.

The idea of an encyclopedia of Mormonism originated with Macmillan Company, but they approached some of our people—I think S. Kent Brown was one of the first they approached—and then it was presented to the Brethren. I'm sure the reason the Brethren were willing that there should be an encyclopedia of Mormonism was so these volumes might be put in large public and university libraries throughout the world so that people wanting to learn about the Church would have some kind of authentic, widespread, easy-to-read information. So the First Presidency selected Daniel H. Ludlow to be the editor-in-chief, and then a board of editors, of which I was one. For about four years we worked on the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*. We had a little hesitation about calling it the "Encyclopedia of Mormonism" (we wanted the correct name of the Church), but Macmillan was insistent that if we used the whole, long Church name, nobody would know who it was. So the agreement was made that under the title *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, it would read *The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*. That was the background, and it was a huge undertaking.

Brother Ludlow did a major piece of work in coordinating and governing all of the work to make the volumes of the encyclopedia. Again, it was done under the leadership of several of the Brethren. It was not an official Church publication, but it does contain a lot of very useful information. Macmillan was surprised that we could do it so quickly and that so many copies were sold. The Church Educational System and many other people ordered copies, and it was a success. I would say it was work—it was very hard work. But working on the scriptures was also hard work. The scriptures were a ten-year project. The encyclopedia was only a four-year project. I did not seek to participate in either of those experiences, but I look back now and feel like that was quite an unusual thing to take this country boy out of Wyoming and put him on two such august committees.

**Baugh:** You were dean of Religious Education at BYU from 1982 to 1991. What were some of the challenges you faced?

**Matthews:** Of course it's a great honor to be dean of Religious

Education, and that also was not an honor I had sought. At the time I was chairman of the Department of Ancient Scripture, but I was asked to be the dean. This was a time of transition for Brigham Young University. There was a major overhaul and a new emphasis given to the university to upgrade the academic standards. New ways in selecting faculty and giving rank advancement were being incorporated. The whole university was undergoing change, particularly in academic areas. To become dean at just such a time without any past experience was rather interesting. One of the challenges was maintaining the proper character of religious education when everything was going toward an academic emphasis. It's my feeling and conviction that while academic excellence and hard study have a place in religious education, the foundation of religious education is testimony and revelation and the building of character. There were some dichotomies presented there, and I was right in the middle of it. Those were some challenges.

*Baugh:* What do you feel were some of your significant accomplishments as dean?

*Matthews:* I think in any academic organization the greatest assets are the faculty, so I feel like the greatest thing I accomplished as dean was the new faculty members we brought on board. We also gave the faculty members opportunity for inservice training and research and various things.

One thing we did was to inaugurate core curriculum. We discovered that students could fill their required numbers of religion hours for university graduation and do it in some areas that were very one-sided. There was a time when Boy Scouting and a number of less-doctrinal courses counted as religion credit. In the core curriculum, we made certain that every student who graduated from BYU would need to study Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and New Testament. That made the faculty who taught Old Testament feel bad, but students still had some electives, and we did not downgrade Old Testament. But in my thinking, Book of Mormon, New Testament, and Doctrine and Covenants were absolutely essential. The core curriculum requirements cover that and still leave room for students to enroll in Church history, Old Testament, Pearl of Great Price, and world religions. I feel that we made some progress when we made the core curriculum scripturally oriented.

There was a lot of desire, even from the administration, to have classes like "Your Religious Problems" and "Principles and Doctrines of Mormonism" in the core, and I resisted making those basic to the

core curriculum because we would have to have those instead of some scripture courses. “Your Religious Problems” would reflect very much the particular mindset of the professor, as would “Principles and Doctrines of Mormonism.” But if you have a scripture course using the Book of Mormon, the Doctrine and Covenants, or the New Testament as the basic text, the Lord designed that curriculum—not a faculty member or group of faculty members. Next to hiring the right kind of faculty and giving the faculty inservice opportunities, I think the establishment of the core curriculum was a major accomplishment.

The core curriculum consisted of two classes covering the entire Book of Mormon, one class from the New Testament, and one class from the Doctrine and Covenants. That doesn’t cover the entire New Testament or the entire Doctrine and Covenants, but it provides some exposure, and that’s very, very important. If you were to look through the catalog of courses before the core curriculum was adopted, you would see that religion credit was given for courses not nearly as basic as Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and New Testament.

*Baugh:* What is your educational philosophy as it relates to religious education at BYU, and what are your concerns about the future of religious education in the Church or at BYU?

*Matthews:* That’s a question that requires much thought, and religion is essentially spiritual. True religion always has to be revelatory. Those are not the kinds of things that thrive in an academic environment. In an academic environment, knowledge is acquired by hard evidence that can be measured and repeated at will, which is experiment oriented, rather than revelation or testimony oriented. I think one of the great challenges at BYU is maintaining the proper spirit or the proper attitude and decorum of true religion in an academic atmosphere and then basing rank advancement and so forth on an academic basis. That is a very interesting challenge.

*Baugh:* You have witnessed many changes in the Church Educational System over the last fifty years. What are some of the most significant?

*Matthews:* I came into the Church Educational System in 1955, teaching seminary, and one of the major changes that I have seen is the way in which the curriculum is handled. In those bygone days, we often used textbooks in Old and New Testament that were written by Protestant scholars, like the book by George A. Buttrick about the parables. One of the major changes that I have seen is that we have adopted courses of study that are anchored and rooted in scripture,

especially latter-day scripture, and in books that are written by members of the Church. Our lessons have gone from social and behavioral objectives to more doctrinal objectives. It's amazing to see the great changes that have taken place in the past fifty years in the curriculum of seminaries and institutes and also at BYU.

*Baugh:* What role do you see BYU having in the larger Church Educational System?

*Matthews:* That's a very good question. This is a major university with a branch in Hawaii and in Rexburg, and there can be no discounting the influence that Brigham Young University has. I think there will always be a Brigham Young University. As I have studied the history of BYU, there have been from time to time changes in policy and direction as to how the university would relate to the rest of the Church school system. I think only the Brethren could answer that question because they constitute the board of trustees. There will always be a Brigham Young University, of necessity. But there will always be seminaries and institutes also. At the present time, they're all under the Church Educational System, but BYU is not the head of the others. I think at one time it was thought that it might become so. I think many thought it ought to be. I don't think it is now, and I don't know what the future will hold. That's a decision the board of trustees will have to make.

*Baugh:* What, to you, is a successful gospel teacher, and when has a teacher truly succeeded?

*Matthews:* I think a successful gospel teacher is one who teaches by the Spirit. Teaching by the Spirit is more than just teaching the truth. If you're teaching by the Spirit, you bear testimony. And not only that, the Spirit indicates to you what should be taught on any particular day. A person could teach truth every day and still not teach by the Spirit unless he or she was teaching the particular truths that the Lord wanted to have taught that day in that class. A successful gospel teacher has to teach by the Spirit. We talk about people who seem to be spiritual, but what makes a person spiritual? A person is spiritual only if he or she has the Holy Spirit. Joseph Smith said that you cannot teach the gospel without the Holy Ghost.

*Baugh:* You've been a Sunday School teacher, bishop, stake patriarch, stake president, and temple president. What aspects of your ecclesiastical callings have been particularly meaningful and rewarding?

*Matthews:* All of those callings had certain frustrations and rewards,

and they've all included dedication, hard work, and, occasionally, a little disappointment. I have done all those things. I've worked at about every level of the Church there is outside of being a General Authority. I suppose the most rewarding and one of the most difficult callings was temple president. I frequently thought while I was president that everything I had done up to that point had prepared me for the demands made upon me as temple president. My years as a seminary teacher, my years as a bishop, my years teaching at BYU, twenty-five years on the Correlation Committee, the Scriptures Committee, the Encyclopedia Committee, my years as husband and father—all those things came together in one assignment as president of the Mount Timpanogos Utah Temple. When you are a temple president, you have much responsibility. You deal with excellent people, but problems arise every day that you never encountered before. You are in the cleanest of surroundings. You are with the highest level of human beings. It's just wonderful! It is difficult at times, but there's nothing like being in the house of the Lord where you feel the Spirit every day. I don't know of anything that is quite like that. For me, being a temple president was a crowning event. I don't know how much longer I'll live, but I hope I have a lot of opportunities to work in the temple. Growth and experience are found in every calling.

*Baugh:* Were you not called as temple president of the Mount Timpanogos Temple even prior to it being dedicated?

*Matthews:* Yes, about six months before it was dedicated. I was first called in May 1996 and served from October 1996 to the first of November 1999.

*Baugh:* Did you select your counselors?

*Matthews:* Yes. My counselors at the beginning were Dan J. Workman, a CES man before his retirement, and Herschel N. Pedersen, a former BYU basketball star, who had spent his life working at Geneva Steel. Both of these brethren were true-blue hard workers, respected by the community, and they were great counselors. Their wives were assistants to my wife as matron. After two and a half years, Brother Workman was called to be president of the temple in Vernal, Utah, and I selected Noel T. Greenwood to replace him. He was from Lindon and had been my stake president at one time. Brother Pedersen then became my first counselor, and Brother Greenwood served as my second counselor.

*Baugh:* And you continue to work as a sealer in the Mount Timpanogos temple?

*Matthews:* That's correct. From the time I was released until the present time, I've been a sealer in the temple.

*Baugh:* And you also continue to be an active patriarch in your stake. Would you care to comment about that?

*Matthews:* Being a patriarch is a unique calling and responsibility. Much of the time you don't know the people who come to receive a blessing. You know they have a recommend signed by their bishop, but you don't know anything about them, and you don't know anything about the family most of the time. I've decided that doesn't matter much anyway because the blessing isn't mine; the blessing has to come from Heavenly Father. Our Father in Heaven is the real Patriarch, and what a patriarch has to do is to be in tune so that when he places his hands upon the head of the person, he can get some inspiration of the blessing the Lord has for that individual. That's not an easy thing. It's a little scary. It's also scary because patriarchal blessings are recorded. The individual is given a typewritten copy. Another copy is sent to the Church Archives in Salt Lake. People read their patriarchal blessings throughout their lives, and you have a short period of time to get the inspiration from the Lord to give them a blessing that they are going to read and that the family is going to value for maybe two or three generations. That's a little different from teaching a Sunday School class.

*Baugh:* What are your plans for the future, and what projects do you hope to finish in the next few years?

*Matthews:* My plans for the future, however long or short that may be, are to continue to work in the temple and continue to serve in the Church in whatever areas I am called. I am particularly interested in the welfare of my children and my grandchildren. I am trying to write a little family history. I'm not trying to write so much about myself, but I'm interested in giving to my children and grandchildren some perspective and understanding of how my father and mother and their families first came into the Church. We haven't been in the Church for generations. I'm the second generation in the Church, and my grandparents joined when they were older. I want my children and grandchildren to know and to have in writing firsthand accounts—clear, convincing, testimony-bearing accounts—of how our family heard about the gospel, left England, came to America, and settled in the West because of the Church. I think if they don't know that, they

won't really know who they are, and they need to know who they are. I frequently talk to my children about my parents and grandparents whom they don't know, including some things about what they have sacrificed and given up for the Church and why they were willing to do it. If children don't have that information about their ancestors, they don't understand about the Apostasy and the Restoration.

*Baugh:* If you could live your life over again, what, if anything, would you do differently?

*Matthews:* It's hard to say. If I could live it over and know then what I know now, I would be a better student in high school. I would probably study a couple of languages so that I could be bilingual. I have studied a little Spanish, French, and German, but not enough to do me any good. My German professor here on campus told me, "Well, you passed, but don't ever try to translate anything," and he was serious about it. So I would get an early start in life on things that would have a lasting influence, and learning a language well enough to converse, to read, to do research, to write, and to speak—that's something I would do. I would learn German, Spanish, and probably Greek. Both of my sons are very conversant in other languages, but it's because of their missions. I went to California, and I had a marvelous experience in the gospel, which I wouldn't trade for any language, but I wish that I had studied more diligently in a language.

*Baugh:* How is your health?

*Matthews:* My health is quite good. I've had a little heart problem in my life. I was telling the doctor recently that I get tired, and he said, "Well, how old are you?" I said, "Going on seventy-eight," and he said, "That has something to do with it. We can't fix all of that." So my health is good. I've lived longer than my father. I've lived longer than my grandfathers. I have several brothers who did not live as long as I have lived. I have some who have lived longer than I have lived, but we're down now to one brother and me. I need to live longer to complete the family records. There are some things in my patriarchal blessing that say what I will do, and I can see a fulfillment of every one of those things but one, and that has to do with family records and a little temple work. If all goes well, some of that will be completed soon, and then I can help my wife cultivate her rose garden, and someday when I have time, I suppose I'll die. **RE**