



h earken, listen, and hear: the ministry of advocacy: dc 45.1-8

i ntroduction

When we think of “translation,” we naturally enough think of the process of conveying the spoken or written word from one language into that of another. Indeed, our word, “translate,” comes from Latin, *translat*, and means ‘to carry across.’ Translation involves more than understanding and carrying across words and grammar from one language to another. The “translator” can get all the words and grammar right, and still not have an “accurate” translation. The translator must consider many other factors as he or she seeks to “carry across” meaning from one language to another. For example, the translator must also consider the narrative context, the historical context, the cultural context, etc. “Audience” and “speaker” are other important considerations. In order to have an accurate and meaningful translation, one must also consider and carry across “tone” or “mood.”

It might seem a bit odd to begin a homily on Doctrine and Covenants 45—a text originally written and now examined in English—with a discussion of translation. The reader might think: “No ‘translation’ is required. ‘Interpretation,’ maybe, but not ‘translation.’”

Fair enough. However, in a sense, all reading is “translation.” A literary bridge consisting of such things as vocabulary, grammar, context, audience, speaker, and tone, among many other factors, must be built so as to “carry across” text from the written page to the heart, mind,

and soul of the reader.

In this homily, we will examine DC 45.¹⁻⁸. In doing so, we will have a look at several “translation” factors that might help “carry across” the meaning of our selected text from the printed page to reader. Though the lexical and grammatical work has already largely been done for us, we can certainly explore more deeply the meaning of words and the grammatical relationships that exist in the text. Though past editors have provided a brief description of the historical/cultural context, as well as the audience and speaker, perhaps a few additional observations will be helpful. We will also examine the narrative context, and the relationship between the various parts of the text. In addition, we will explore in some depth the matter of “tone,” an often over looked aspect of appropriate translation and interpretation.

Context and audience

As the heading to DC 45 makes clear, this revelation was given in March of 1831 while the American prophet, Joseph Smith, resided in Kirtland, Ohio. Joseph had arrived in Kirtland the last week of January of the same year. DC 45 represents the fifth revelation Joseph received after taking up residence in the city.

This same Joseph would later offer a key to understanding the parables of Jesus, in particular, and of scripture in general. Said he,

“I have a key by which I understand the scriptures. I enquire, what was the question which drew out the answer, or caused Jesus to utter the parable...? To ascertain its meaning, we must dig up the root and ascertain what it was that drew the saying out of Jesus”¹

By any scholarly judgment, this is excellent critical methodology. This same “key” can profitably be utilized in the interpretation of DC 45. We can ask, “What ‘drew out’ this revelation?”

¹ *HC*, Vol. 5, p. 261-262

The heading of the section quotes Joseph Smith, informing the reader that “many false reports... and foolish stories were published... and circulated,... to prevent people from investigating the work, or embracing the faith.” Joseph is then quoted as saying, “But to the joy of the Saints,... I received the following.”

That “but” is significant. It suggests that DC 45 is a response to the attacks made upon the character of the Church. Given this context, which serves as an interpretive key, it is logical to consider that the response would take one of two forms: “defense” against those who were circulating the “false reports” and “foolish stories,” or “comfort and assurance” (with an element of apologia) aimed at those whose commitment to the Church was under attack. These two responses could be thought of as the tone or mood of the text, defensive and argumentative or encouraging, depending upon the audience.

Given that this revelation would be, predominantly, read by members of the Church, it does not seem like a stretch to conclude that members of the Church were the intended audience, and that the tone is that of encouragement, comfort and assurance. But we need not rely on speculation concerning the audience and thus the likely underlying tone. The revelation begins with these words:

“Hearken, O *ye people of my church*, to who the kingdom has been given...”

Then, in verse six, the Lord, encouraging attention again, says,² “Hearken, O ye people of my church, and ye elders...”³ It seems, then, secure: members of the Church are the section’s intended audience. DC 45 intends to comfort and encourage a somewhat beleaguered community. Having come to this conclusion, we will have more to say about the “tone” with which this revelation should be read.

² I could have written “... the Lord, encouraging attention again, commands...” My “the Lord, encouraging attention again, says...” remains, for now, neutral in regard to tone.

³ Verse 6, emphasis added

As with nearly every revelation found in the Doctrine and Covenants, the words, while delivered by Joseph Smith, are claimed to have been given him by God, the Son. They are, then, the words of Jesus as filtered through Joseph. Jesus is the speaker. This becomes directly clear at the beginning of the text.

Though one may assume that such a speaker as Jesus needs no introduction or commendation, the revelation, nevertheless, begins with a recommendation concerning the worthy and significant source of revelation that God, the Son is. DC 45 returns to such commendation throughout. To begin, Jesus introduces Himself as

“[He] who laid the foundation of the earth, who made the heavens and all the host thereof, and by whom all things were made which live, and move, and have a being.”⁴

If we consider the historical context, such an introduction could hold one of two moods. If aimed at the attackers, it could be read of as a kind of warning or threat: “You people who are fighting me and my Church, are taking on the greatest power in the universe; Repent! Watch out! Back off!”

However, we have concluded that the revelation is aimed at members of the Church. Therefore, intimidation is not required and, indeed, seems inappropriate to the context. Encouragement, comfort and assurance are, however, very much in demand. As part of the revelation’s encouragement, comfort and assurance, the saints are reminded that God, the Son, is the great controlling power of the universe. Inasmuch as he has created everything that “live[s] and move[s], and [has] a being,” he is in control. He carried out his plans in creation. Any plans he has for the earth’s post-creation history will be equally successful. The earth and its inhabitants will fulfill the measure of their creation. No need to fear. Things will be as things should be.

⁴ Verse 1

This is such an assurance as the Psalmist offered many, many centuries earlier.

“Happy is he that hath the God of Jacob for his help,
whose hope is in the LORD his God:
Which made heaven, and earth,
the sea, and all that therein is:
which keepeth truth for ever:
Which executeth judgment for the oppressed:
which giveth food to the hungry.
The LORD looseth the prisoners:
The LORD openeth the eyes of the blind:
the LORD raiseth them that are bowed down:
the LORD loveth the righteous:
The LORD preserveth the strangers;
he relieveth the fatherless and widow:
but the way of the wicked he turneth upside down.”⁵

This humble and beleaguered community has nothing to fear. His creative powers are proof positive of his governing powers.

In the final two verses of our selected text, God, the Son, offers additional self-revelation.

“I am Alpha and Omega,
the beginning and the end,
the light and the life of the world—
a light that shineth in darkness
and the darkness comprehendeth it not.
I came unto mine own, and mine own received me not;
but unto as many as received me gave I power to do many miracles,
and to become the sons of God;
and even unto them that believed on my name gave I power to obtain eternal life.”

⁵Psalm 146.⁵⁻⁹

These words, of course, were spoken by and of Jesus in the New Testament.⁶ There is in these words a wealth of knowledge concerning Jesus. For our purposes here, we will focus on just a couple of things that we learn about Jesus from this introductory divine self-revelation.

We learned in the heading to DC 45 that “many false reports... and foolish stories... [were] published... and circulated” about the saints and the Church they so much loved. Jesus here reminds the saints that they should not be surprised or negatively affected by such attacks. Darkness has always misunderstood and chased light. Jesus himself has always been misunderstood. Just as some of the present “false reports” and “foolish stories” are coming from those who were once members of the Church, Jesus was rejected by his “own.” Ultimately, such misunderstanding and rejection brought about his death.

On the other hand, God, the Son, will gift those who understand and receive him. Jesus will gift them to endure their trials. Miracles, none greater than that which translates one from fallen man to divine sonship, will facilitate such endurance. Enduring through the miracle of rebirth, the saints are promised the greatest of all God’s gifts: eternal life.

What comfort is found in such assurances! There are many more assurances found in the remainder of this revelation. In fact, the entire revelation should be read as one long assurance offered members of his Church.

But, to conclude this portion of our discussion on the revelation’s speaker: the voice is that of God, the Son, creator, ruler, upholder of all creation, and Savior of all who receive and trust him.

⁶ See, for example, John 1.⁴⁻¹³ and Revelation 1.⁸

In our previous remarks, we have suggested that in DC 45, God, the Son, maker, governor, and Savior of creation, speaks to his beleaguered saints in hopes of comforting and encouraging them. With this context, we now turn to the very first word uttered in the revelation: “hearken.” This word is repeated three more times in our selected text.⁷ In addition, the saints will be asked to “listen” and to “hear,” one time each.

We first invite the reader to read the following words found in verses 1-2. In doing so, we invite him or her to read the thrice repeated word, “hearken,” in the tone in which you feel God delivered it, and in which he wished the saints to receive it.

*“Hearken, O ye people of my church, to whom the kingdom has been given;
hearken ye and give ear to him who laid the foundation of the earth,
who made the heavens and all the hosts thereof,
and by whom all things were made which live, and move, and have a being.
And again I say, hearken unto my voice, lest death shall overtake you;
in an hour when ye think not the summer shall be past, and the harvest ended,
and your souls not saved.*

I would now ask the reader to determine whether this thrice repeated “hearken,” is to be read as “command,” “decree,” or as “invitation.” Is it “welcoming” or “threatening,” “intimidating”? This question of “tone” is a matter of “translation” and interpretation. The “tone” one adopts here says something about the character of God, or, at least, the character of God as the reader understands it.

Some might complain, “Oh, this is all just subjective speculation.”

Maybe. But how one reads it can impact how they relate to God, and thus how they relate to others.

⁷ And twice more outside our selected text in verse 11 and verse 15.

So, I ask again, what is the tone of the Lord’s “hearken” found in DC 45.¹⁻²? Is there an “objective” tone?

Well, let’s see.

to what do we “hearken”

We now know to whom we are to “hearken” (God, the Son), to whom the invitation is extended (the saints), and why they are invited to hearken (for comfort and encouragement). While keeping in mind the “tone” in which this invitation is given, we now ask the following question: “To what are the saints to hearken?” The answer to this question might assist us if we are still unsure about “tone.”

One could understand the invitation to “hearken” to be universal. The saints are to give heed to “every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the LORD”⁸ past, present, and future. Certainly, such hearkening is desirable and commendable. But, in the context of DC 45, I wish to suggest a less universal understanding of the invitation. One could understand the invitation to apply to the entirety of the revelation found in DC 45. The saints will be well served in hearkening to all that is said in DC 45. But, I think there is reason to narrow our focus.

“Listen,” we are invited in verse three, “to him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading your cause before him...” Among other things, this invitation provides us with additional revelation concerning Jesus. In addition to being creator and governor of the universe; in addition to being un-comprehended and rejected light; in addition to being the agent of our spiritual birth and author of our eternal life, he is “advocate.” He pleads for us. He defends us against accusation and slander.

⁸ See Deuteronomy 8.³

This invitation to “listen” is followed by a direct self-quotation: “saying...

“Father,⁹ behold the sufferings and death of him who did no sin,
in whom thou wast well pleased;
behold the blood of thy Son which was shed,
the blood of him whom thou gavest that thyself might be glorified;
Wherefore, Father, spare these my brethren that believe on my name,
that they may come unto me and have everlasting life.”

Now, as we have seen, God, the Son, has been speaking throughout our selected text. He will continue to speak throughout the section. But here, for the first and only time in DC 45, Jesus resorts to a direct and intimate self-quotation.

The one who created and governs all creation; the one who is the first and last; the one who, as light of the world, is greater than that big ball of energy we call “the sun”; the one who makes possible the eternal life of all beings is an “advocate.” He is a “pleader.” He is a “defender.” He is a sufferer. And he pleads and suffers for us.

I don’t think it is too much to suggest that from the section’s very first “hearken” these are the specific words to which we are invited to “hearken;” the plea to which we are to “listen.” This is the voice and these are the words that we are invited to hear. Not only is all that follows in this revelation based and dependent upon this great advocacy, but everything that “lives, and moves, and has a being” is dependent upon this great and merciful act of advocacy. “Hearken, hear, and listen to this, my prayer for each of you.”

Now, I would like to come back to the matter of “tone.” In what tone does Jesus extend the invitation for the saints to listen in on the prayer he offers for their deliverance and safety? I don’t know how it seems to you, but, to me, it makes little sense to read the “hearken,” “listen,” and “hear” of DC 45 as a *command* to witness Jesus’ gracious and generous words and acts of advocacy. Such a reading seems rather like a parent’s “commanding” a child to open their present on Christmas morning. Such a reading seems, to me, an absurdity.

⁹ This is another “proof,” if one was needed, that we are listening to the words of Jesus in this revelation.

No, it seems best to hear the tone throughout our selected text as one of comforting and encouraging invitation. It is by means of Jesus' anxious invitation that we hear him pray for us; that we hear our name escape his lips. To my ears, the invitation has a pleading, rather than demanding tone.

“Please, please, please, please listen to the words I pray in your behalf, and understand thereby how very, very valuable you are to me. It was not lightly that I confessed,

‘Remember the worth of souls is great in the sight of God;
for, behold, the Lord your Redeemer suffered death in the flesh;
wherefore he suffered the pain of all men,
that all men might repent
and come unto him.’”¹⁰

the voice of advocacy

Advocacy, then, is one of God, the Son's, foundational character traits. We should expect to find it throughout scripture. It might take many forms.

We hear, for example, the voice of advocacy in Yahweh's taking up the cause of a beleaguered band of slaves, demanding that the oppressive powers that bind them “Let my people go.”¹¹ We hear the voice of advocacy in Yahweh's inflicting economic hardships upon the defiant oppressor through plague. Finally, we hear the voice of advocacy when Yahweh becomes “a man of war;”¹² effecting emancipation by his military victory over the obstinate oppressing power at the Red Sea. Such advocacy for the oppressed is one of the most enduring revelations concerning the character of God found in the Hebrew Bible. The text comes back to it over and over and over again.

¹⁰ DC 18.¹⁰⁻¹¹

¹¹ See, for example, Exodus 5.¹¹

¹² Exodus 15.³

”For he shall deliver the needy when he crieth;
the poor also, and him that hath no helper.
He shall spare the poor and needy,
and shall save the souls of the needy.
He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence:
and precious shall their blood be in his sight.”¹³

And then, Deity came to earth, entered a tabernacle of clay, and immediately took up the mantle of advocacy. The leper, the blind, the deaf, the dumb, the lame, the palsied, the bleeding, the sinner—all these and more heard the voice of the advocate pleading their cause.

“Seest thou this woman? I entered into thine house, thou gavest me no water for my feet: but she hath washed my feet with tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head. Thou gavest me no kiss: but this woman since the time I came in hath not ceased to kiss my feet. My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment. Wherefore I say unto thee, Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth little.’
And he said unto her, ‘Thy sins are forgiven.’”¹⁴

“And they brought young children to him, that he should touch them: and his disciples rebuked those that brought them. But when Jesus saw it, he was much displeased, and said unto them, ‘*Suffer the little children to come unto me*, and forbid them not: for of such is the kingdom of God’... And he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them.”¹⁵

“Judas then, having received a band of men and officers from the chief priests and Pharisees, cometh thither with lanterns and torches and weapons. Jesus... asked... them again, ‘Whom seek ye?’

¹³ Psalm 72.¹²⁻¹⁴

¹⁴ Luke 7.⁴⁴⁻⁴⁸

¹⁵ Mark 10.^{13-14, 16}, emphasis added

And they said, ‘Jesus of Nazareth.’

Jesus answered, ‘I have told you that I am he: if therefore ye seek me, *let these go their way:*’ that the saying might be fulfilled, which he spake, ‘Of them which thou gavest me have I lost none.’”¹⁶

“Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do.”¹⁷

After too-short a life of advocacy and an excruciating death, itself evidence of the spirit of advocacy, and an unexpected resurrection, further proof of advocacy, he appeared again, this time in the New World to demonstrate and expand the witness of his advocacy.

“And it came to pass that when they had knelt upon the ground, Jesus groaned within himself, and said: ‘Father, I am troubled because of the wickedness of the people of the house of Israel.’

And when he had said these words, he himself also knelt upon the earth; and behold he prayed unto the Father, and the things which he prayed cannot be written, and the multitude did bear record who heard him.

And after this manner do they bear record: ‘The eye hath never seen, neither hath the ear heard, before, so great and marvelous things as we saw and heard Jesus speak unto the Father; and no tongue can speak, neither can there be written by any man, neither can the hearts of men conceive so great and marvelous things as we both saw and heard Jesus speak; and no one can conceive of the joy which filled our souls at the time *we heard him pray for us unto the Father.*’”¹⁸

Scripture’s witness is clear. God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. If he advocated and prayed for Hebrew slaves whose lives were made “bitter with hard bondage;”¹⁹ if he advocated and prayed for first century AD sufferers who “labour[ed] and [were] heavy laden;”²⁰ if he advocated and prayed for New World “wanderers...born in tribulation” who

¹⁶ See John 18.³⁻⁹, emphasis added

¹⁷ Luke 23.³⁴

¹⁸ 3 Nephi 17.¹⁴⁻¹⁷, emphasis added

¹⁹ See Exodus 1.¹⁴

²⁰ Matthew 11.²⁸

“mourn[ed] out [their] days;”²¹ if he advocated and prayed for 19th century saints suffering the insult of “false reports... and foolish stories;” then this never changing Being, with his disposition to advocate, is still advocating and praying for those who suffer, however unaware and uncertain of that advocacy they may be.

But, I believe, we need not remain unaware of his personal and intimate advocacy. We can, I believe, hear and sense the advocacy of the creator and governor of the universe as he prays for us. We can, I testify, listen in on his prayers. We can experience the unspeakable joy of hearing our names escape his lips. The human tongue does indeed lack the capacity to adequately describe the generous and glorious love and concern that is to be found in this Divine ministry of gracious advocacy. Nevertheless, it is knowable. It can be felt and appreciated.

g^o, and do thou likewise

Now, it is never quite enough to appreciate and accept the advocacy of Deity. Having heard the voice of advocacy, we are called to imitate that advocacy and practice advocacy in the lives of others. We are called to the ministry of advocacy and reconciliation in a world enshrouded in the darkness of selfishness, individualism, and hostility.

“And know ye that ye shall be judges of this people,
according to the judgment which I shall give unto you,
which shall be just.

Therefore, what manner of men ought ye to be?

Verily I say unto you, even as I am.”²²

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”²³

²¹ Jacob 7.²⁶

²² 3 Nephi 27.²⁷

²³ Luke 6.³⁶

“O thou wicked servant, I forgave thee all that debt, because thou desiredst me: shouldst not thou also have had compassion on thy fellowservant, even as I had pity on thee?”²⁴

“And if a stranger sojourn with thee in your land, ye shall not vex him. But the stranger that dwelleth with you shall be unto you as one born among you, and thou shalt love him as thyself; for ye were strangers in the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.”²⁵

Ancient Israel was called to this ministry. But, as Isaiah makes abundantly clear, it resisted such ministry. Without an advocating servant, the world was, therefore, left vulnerable to all the evils of accusation, prosecution, oppression, and, finally, violent terror and bloodshed. For this reason and for this failure the nation was punished. It was scattered to the winds. Some three hundred years after the ministry of the perfect and divine Advocate, Christianity, called to be a New Israel, another ministering advocate, adopted the imperial ideal of Roman dominance, prosecuting wars of ‘anti-advocacy’ rather than the divinely appointed ministry of reconciliation. To this very day, our fathers having eaten sour grapes, we find our teeth set on edge.²⁶

And what of those beloved American saints, the latest of the New Israelites called to the ministry of reconciliation? Rather than entering the ministry of advocacy and reconciliation; rather than “every man seeking the interest of his neighbor,”²⁷ they drank from the poisonous wells of Babylon, engaging in “jarrings, and contentions, and envyings, and strifes, and lustful and covetous desires.”²⁸ Having forsaken the ministry of advocacy and reconciliation as ancient Israel and early Christianity before it; having, thereby, “polluted their inheritances”²⁹ (not only, or principally, their inheritance in property by of ministry), they were cast out with a warning,

“When men are called unto mine everlasting gospel, and covenant with an everlasting covenant, they are accounted as the salt of the earth and the savor of men; they are called

²⁴ Matthew 18.³²⁻³³

²⁵ Leviticus 19.³³⁻³⁴

²⁶ See Jeremiah 31.²⁹

²⁷ See DC 82.¹⁹

²⁸ See DC 101.⁶

²⁹ DC 101.⁶

to be the savor of men; therefore, if that salt of the earth lose its savor, behold, it is thenceforth good for nothing only to be cast out and trodden under the feet of men.”³⁰

This, of course, is simply a restatement of the commission that Jesus’ gave his 1st century AD disciples, as delivered during his Sermon on the Mount.

“Ye are the salt of the earth:
but if the salt have lost his savour, wherewith shall it be salted?
It is thenceforth good for nothing, but to be cast out, and to be trodden under foot of men.
Ye are the light of the world.
A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid.
Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel,
but on a candlestick;
and it giveth light unto all that are in the house.
Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good works,
and glorify your Father which is in heaven.”³¹

Conclusion

The saints were under assault. “False reports... and foolish stories, were published... and circulated” about them. They were in need of help. The great creator and governor of all creation saw their affliction and promised that he would come to their defense. He would advocate for them. They were invited, not commanded, to listen “while it is today” to this surprising and gracious voice of advocacy. They were privileged to hear the voice of the Advocate Himself, and to feel the peace and joy his irresistible advocacy could bring.

We all are. We are all under assault. There is one who is not only tempter, but “accuser of his

³⁰ DC 101.³⁹⁻⁴⁰

³¹ Matthew 5.13-16

brethren.”³² He is constantly whispering “false reports” into our ears. His assault upon our sense of worth is constant and continual. But we too have an advocate. His advocacy will put the lie to the accusers lies and restore our sense of worth. We may—if we “harden not [our] hearts;”³³ if we do not “refuse to be comforted;”³⁴ if we choose to “understand [God’s] mercies which [He] hast bestowed upon [us] because of [His] Son”³⁵—may hear and feel his prayer for us. We may rejoice in, and find security in the advocacy of “him who is the advocate with the Father, who is pleading [our] cause before him.”

This is all clearly and unquestionably by way of invitation. This is the tone of our entire selected text. However, if we look for “command” we will find it in the Advocate’s expectation that we “go and do likewise.” Even here, however, the “command” has the tone of invitation; for the blessings of bringing advocacy into the life of others... Oh “how great is his joy!”³⁶ We are, then, invited to enter the ministry of advocacy and reconciliation. We are to advocate for those who, themselves, hear and feel the devastating “false reports,” whether from the mouth of “demons, or men, or whatever it be,”³⁷ of their worthlessness. In thus advocating; in thus destroying the “false reports;” in thus helping them understand their worth in the sight of God, they can turn around and “go and do likewise.”

³²Revelation 12.¹⁰

³³ Dc 45.⁶

³⁴ Moses 7.⁴⁴

³⁵ Alma 33.¹⁶

³⁶ See DC 18.¹³

³⁷ Hymn #105, “Master the Tempest is Raging”