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Source: *The Book of Mormon: First Nephi, The Doctrinal Foundation*

Editor(s): Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate, Jr.

Published: Provo, UT; Religious Studies Center, 1988

Page(s): 297-314



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B. H. ROBERTS: THE BOOK OF MORMON AND THE ATONEMENT

Truman G. Madsen

Less than a year after B. H. Roberts returned from presiding over the Eastern States Mission, he was asked by an editor of a national magazine, "Why does Mormonism appeal to you?" He sat down and wrote the following nine-point list:

1. Its views of God,
2. Its views of man,
3. Its views of creation and the universe,
4. Its views of the purpose of life,
5. Its views of the atonement of the Christ,
6. Its views of the gospel as a means of man's salvation,
7. The grandeur and consistency of its development as the dispensation of the fulness of times, the completion of the plans of God with reference to the redemption of the earth and the salvation of man, and finally,
8. Its views of the physical resurrection and the
9. future degrees of glory to which man will be assigned as the outcome of his earth life.¹

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Those nine points multiplied by six chapters each, were the structure of a fifty-five-chapter work titled "The Truth, the Way and the Life" (hereafter TWL), on which he was then far along. That volume was the mature summation of his entire life's studies. Its production was arduous. He wrote to a former missionary that he had "poured out a wealth of work" on it—indeed, he expended much of the energy of the last six years of his life on the project. Substantially it was drawn into shape in Brooklyn during a six-month period after his release as mission president. On special leave given him by President Heber J. Grant, he remained in New York, in a little apartment on the Hudson River, and daily dictated elements of this manuscript to his secretary.²

The Truth, the Way, the Life

Some time ago, I published a thirty-page account of this volume, its background, its form and features, and the essential themes it treats.³ More concerned with controversy than clarification, many have read only Roberts's speculative and now obsolete sections on science. Those sections were the main reasons the manuscript remained unpublished. None have written about its pervasive inclusion of the Book of Mormon, both in its historical and doctrinal phases. Here I propose a beginning in that direction.

The Quest for Coherence

Roberts's driving aspiration in TWL is longstanding. In his speaking and writing, Roberts sought to show coherence and system. He frequently lamented that we only understand or teach the Restoration in fragments. Out of all of these fragments, he believed one could, if one had the power and the patience, draw together what he called an "ever mighty system of truth."⁴ He did not envision a closed system, for Mormonism is open in nature, open upward to further clarifying and expanding revelation from on high, and open downward to the ever-growing expanse of human experience. Nevertheless, he repeatedly said he would account himself most happy if only he could reduce these truths to some orderly system. His secretary, Elsa Cook, reports

that during his labor on this his final work he would often say, "It is wonderful how the gospel hangs together."⁵

As the title of his work manifests, he saw the center of the system as Jesus the Christ: He is the Truth, He is the Way, and He is the Life.⁶ And that for Roberts is the permeating message of the Book of Mormon

Roberts's Estimate of TWL

Roberts's own high estimate of his final manuscript is apparent in his correspondence. In 1929 when the manuscript was in most parts complete, he described it as his "latest and greatest work."⁷ He later called the summation "the climax" of the "doctrinal department of my work, just as the *Comprehensive History* made the climax to my historical contributions."⁸ His history volumes, 5 of 6, were finished by April of 1930, the Church's centennial. In a commemorative address, he placed the volumes on the Tabernacle pulpit and called them his gospel sermon. In February 1931, he wrote to President Heber J. Grant that in TWL he had crystallized practically all of his thought, research, and studies in the doctrinal line of the Church and that it was "the *most* important work that I have yet contributed to the Church, the six volume *Comprehensive History of the Church* not omitted."⁹ In his final month (September 1933) he dictated a note to his secretary in which he said he hoped the ideas in TWL would be embraced by the youth of the Church. He wanted these ideas to reach the youth so they would not only "intellectually assent to [them] as an advanced system of truth, but also become imbued with [their] spirit and feel and enjoy [their] powers."¹⁰ A year before his death, he had written that with his "incurable ailment" (by now the ravages of his diabetes had required a foot amputation), he hoped he would not die before his book could be published. Yet he added, "That work may not likely be printed in my lifetime. . . . I will not change it if it has to sleep."¹¹

In accordance with his passion for reconciliation, Roberts writes at the outset of TWL, "let us not have the heart breathing defiance to the intellect." The inscription on the title page says, "Religion to be effective must appeal to the understanding as well as the emotions."¹² He believed TWL had received and would yet receive vindication in human experience, not only in its parts, but as a whole.

Additions and Expositions

Much of what Roberts writes about Christ and the Atonement in TWL was anticipated in his 1908 *Seventy's Yearbook*, an entire year's study course for the Seventy which dealt with the Atonement.¹³ Every book of the Book of Mormon (with the exception of Jarom, Enos, and Omni) is utilized in depth in the chapters on the Atonement in TWL. The focus is especially on doctrinal sections and sermons and explications—1 and 2 Nephi, Jacob, Mosiah, Alma, Helaman, 3 and 4 Nephi, Ether, Mormon, and Moroni. In four different chapter introductions, he recommends as background, "Read the Book of Mormon entire." His elaborate scriptural foundation for the Atonement is the heart of hearts of TWL. At the outset of these six chapters on the Atonement, Roberts writes, "I must . . . ask that there be a suspension of judgment on the respective parts of the theme until all shall have been read; as knowledge of the whole, I am sure, will be necessary to complete understanding of the parts" (TWL, 40). Two sections deal with "Book of Mormon Prophecies of the Atonement" (2 Nephi 2:26, 27; Mosiah 3:16–18) and "Book of Mormon Historical Utterances on the Atonement" (3 Nephi 9:15–18, 21; 3 Nephi 11:9–11; Moroni 7:41; *Id.* See TWL, 40). In his introduction to 3 Nephi he writes, "The most important utterances that can come to man on any subject would be what the Lord Jesus Christ himself would say upon those subjects. For that reason, I am limiting the historical statements of the Book of Mormon on the Atonement to such words as were alleged to have been spoken by the risen Lord Jesus." (TWL, 40.) Then he cites 3 Nephi 9 and later chapters.

Here, arranged in columns, are the major chapters in TWL which are buttressed by the Book of Mormon:

<i>Chapter</i>	<i>Title</i>	<i>Book of Mormon chapter and / or verses</i>
1	Dissertation on Truth	Jacob 4:13
26	Pre-existence of Spirits	Alma 11:38–39
27	Purpose of God in Earth Life of Man	Book of Mormon entire, especially 2 Nephi 2:1–20; 2 Nephi 2:24–25; Ether 3.

32	Life Status of Adam and Eve at Their Advent	Book of Mormon entire, especially Mosiah 16:8, 9, 10, 18; Alma 11, 40
33	The Problem of Evil	2 Nephi 2; Alma 42
34	The Affair in Eden, the Fall of Man	2 Nephi 2; Alma 12:19–25; Alma 42
35	After the Fall, the First Dispensation of the Gospel	2 Nephi 2:14–30; Mosiah 4:4–12; Alma 11:38–46; Alma 42.
39	The Meridian Dispensation	Mosiah 15:4; Alma 11:38, 39; 3 Nephi 11:17; 11:23–26; Moroni chapters 4–5.
40	The Atonement I—The Revealed Fact of the Atonement	Book of Mormon entire, especially 3 Nephi. Also Mosiah 3, 4, 5; Moroni 7:41. Index references on “atonement.”
43	The Atonement IV—Could Other Means than the Atonement Have Brought to Pass Man’s Salvation?	Book of Mormon entire, especially 1 Nephi 9:7; 2 Nephi 9:21; Alma 13:14, 34:8–14.
44	The Atonement V—The Atonement of Broader Scope Than Making Satisfaction for Adam’s Sin	2 Nephi 2, 9, 25; Alma 12, 34, 42; Helaman 14:17–18; Mormon 9; Moroni 8.
49	The Life: Under Commandments of God	Book of Mormon entire.
50	The Life: Sermon on the Mount—I	3 Nephi entire
51	The Life: Sermon on the Mount—II	3 Nephi entire

The Presuppositions of Atonement

We turn now to the weightiest of Roberts's writing, his account of the factors that must be kept in mind to comprehend the Atonement (TWL, 43).

First, a reign of law subsists throughout the universe. Roberts cites Nephi, Alma, and others on law, inexorable law, self-existent law. Law, he insists, prevails in the spiritual as well as in the physical realm. Whether inherent in the nature of things or instituted by divine initiative, all laws have bounds and conditions. This perfect reign of law and the reign of perfect law is in strict harmony with God's attributes, and God's attributes with it.

Second, violations of law, out of ignorance or deliberation, destroy the steady maintenance of the law and involve transgressors in the penalties inseparably connected with law. Without these, law would be of no efficacy at all. Law prescribes the consequences of one's acts. But law is not totally coercive. Certain consequences are inevitable, but our choice of them and our responses to them are not.

Third, two kinds of things exist in the universe. In the language of the Book of Mormon, these are "things to act and things to be acted upon."¹⁴ Men are among the things to act. We are free and, within limits, eternally free. When we obey the laws, certain results follow; whether we ignore or disobey, "Suffering is the consequence or penalty of violating divine, moral law" (TWL, 43).

Fourth, the attributes of God, complete and perfect as they are, exist in harmony with each other, no one supplanting another or intruding upon its domain. Over and over the Book of Mormon says, if so and so, then "God would cease to be God," or again, "God cannot. . . ." He cannot, for example, lie or deny his word, or violate his promises (TWL, 43). The "cannot" does not mean that he lacks the power, for that would mean that God has less power than man. It means that in harmony with the attributes of his nature he *will* not violate law. Ancient debate asks whether God's will is right because he wills it, or whether he wills it because it is right." Roberts opts for the second position and insists that once the "broken harmonies" are overcome, man's will, like God's, will harmonize with eternal law.

Any manifestation of God's initiative in special providence or mercy, even that actuated by Divine love, must not and will

not violate this core-conception of the attributes of Deity (TWL, 14).

Fifth, the world cries out for justice and mercy. Roberts had written earlier that nowhere in all sacred literature, not even in the New Testament, is the balance of justice and mercy so clearly taught as in the Book of Mormon. "And now," he writes, "it is justice that cries aloud for their presence in the divine government" (TWL, 43). But is there not a clash between justice and mercy? The Book of Mormon asks, "Do you suppose that mercy can rob justice?" and answers no (Alma 42:25). How, then, are they reconciled? The answer is that those who do not harden their hearts but instead in penitence with a broken heart and a contrite spirit surrender in response to mercy are the only ones unto whom the ends of the law, which are love and mercy, can be answered. To put it differently: When men after transgression, or setback, or willful failure, are contrite, it is *just* that they should receive mercy, which leads to repentance and healing. Otherwise, justice would require that they receive none.¹⁵ To bring love and mercy into the world in harmony with all the attributes of God required the Atonement. Jesus became the voluntary Messiah.

But why shouldn't the Atonement be dispensed with altogether? With Alma, whom he thought "among the greatest of the ancient American prophets," Roberts says it is "expedient," and in brackets he interprets *expedient* to mean necessary. The great and last sacrifice must occur, infinite and eternal, for the highest impact on the family of God (see Alma 34:8-14). "Even God's omnipotence must conform to the attributes of truth and wisdom and justice and mercy. But neither justice nor mercy would require nor permit more suffering on the part of the redeemer than was absolutely necessary." (TWL, 34.) Otherwise, it would be cruelty, pure and simple. The testator's blood is the effectual seal of the testimony of the testator (see 1 Nephi 9:7; Alma 13, 14). Hence came a Lord of life with power of life within himself and power to impart it in a voluntary act.

For Roberts, exalted conceptions arise from all this: greater respect for the moral government of the world, for the majesty and justice of God, for the physical life of the hereafter (resurrection), for the spiritual life, the indissoluble union of man with God, for God's mercy, and over all for the love of God. And why? Because for each of these Christ suffered and died. "Behold, he suffereth . . . the pains of every living creature, both men, women, and children, who belong to the family of Adam" (2 Nephi 9:21).

Implications: Four Kinds of Suffering

Now some personal applications. The Atonement involves suffering. Roberts identifies four modes of suffering. He begins with the premise that mental-spiritual suffering is no less real and no less intense than is physical suffering.

1. We suffer *for* our own sins, in the wake of, because of, and due to them.
2. We suffer *because of* the sins of others; for example, as parents for our children, and as children for our parents.
3. We suffer *with* each other on account of sin "through common human sympathy."
4. We are *willing to suffer for each other* (TWL, 45).

It has been said Christ came into the world not that men might not suffer but that their sufferings might be like his.¹⁶ The more one identifies with Christ, the more one identifies with those who are his and also those who refuse thus far to become his. Hence the soul-cry, "Oh Absalom, my son! Would to God I had died for thee." (2 Samuel 18:33.) So parents cry out for children; so children for parents. In some cases so strangers for strangers (TWL, 45).

Roberts embraced these profoundly intimate verses in the book of Alma on the sufferings of Christ. "He shall go forth," says Alma, looking forward through time as we look backward, "suffering pains and afflictions and temptations of every kind." Alma explains that this was required, but not in the sense that it was fated or inevitable. Rather, it was in order that Christ's bowels (the Hebrew word for the center self) "may be filled with mercy . . . that he may know . . . how to succor his people." It is true that the Spirit "knoweth all things." Yet Alma says, "Nevertheless the Son of God suffereth according to the flesh." (Alma 7:11–13; also 2 Nephi 9:21.)

The clear implication here and elsewhere in the Book of Mormon is that if Christ had not submitted to the pains and afflictions and temptations as a participant and not simply as an ideal spectator, he would have been incapable of the deepest levels of compassion. Compassion came through his experience,

experience in the flesh. Roberts emphasizes throughout his treatise the primacy, the preciousness, the cruciality of mortal experience as the very meaning of life. It cannot be circumvented. Actually or vicariously we must go through it all. Then will emerge, he says, "New Righteousness" based upon virtue instead of upon innocence; it will be "righteousness founded upon experience, upon tested experimentation and intelligent righteousness" (TWL, 24).

The Law of Opposites

But couldn't God have overcome evil in some other way? Roberts reads the Book of Mormon as a "testimony" to the eternity of opposite existences including evil. He writes, "The sacred writer Lehi . . . boldly carries the necessity of such existences to such an extreme that . . . he makes existence itself, and even the existence of God, to depend upon the fact of things existing in duality" (TWL, 32).

As examples, Roberts cites centripetal and centrifugal forces, action and reaction, composing and decomposing, positive and negative; then light and darkness, movement, and repose, energy and matter, heat and cold, life and death, "the one and the multiple." In the moral order, he names good and evil, joy and sorrow, courage and cowardice, righteousness and wickedness. (TWL, 33.)

Conclusion: "God did not create evil. Neither is he responsible for it." (TWL, 43.)

A dominant philosophical tradition rejects this sequence of explanation and justification. It argues that if there is any self-existent or co-existent reality besides God, it and not God is God. This tradition says, "God only is self-existent and all other reality is utterly contingent upon him."¹⁷ The view is enmeshed with two premises to which the Book of Mormon teaching is a clear alternative: (1) The absolute *ex nihilo* creation. This means that God by fiat act brought into being everything that is, from nothing. For Roberts, this leads to an intractable problem despite labored special pleading. For it means the very conditions to which the Atonement was in answer were created by God himself. The second is absolute omnipotence and omniscience of God. It follows that with unqualified, absolute pre-vision and pre-power to do otherwise, he tied knots which he then inscrutably untied through his innocent Son. How could a God of love, of limitless

power and knowledge, set up such a system? How can we avoid the conclusion that in such a plan he is vindictive, even malicious? (TWL, 33.)

But Roberts is saying in the name of the Book of Mormon that God did not create the dilemma of free selves and inviolate law. God is self-existent but we ourselves are co-existent with him—as spirits, or intelligence. He himself has mastered and fulfilled and become what he is, in harmony with law. He has all the power it is possible to have in this given universe (Roberts would prefer to say pluriverse).¹⁸ In that sense, he is almighty. But he does not have all power. He could not have done it in another way with the same results.¹⁹

The Resolving of Paradox

Now, let us sketch implications of this eternalism which requires radical reformulation of classical views. Traditional theism absolutely divides the realm beyond, the divine realm, from the physical and the earthly. Usually these are so polarized that not one quality ascribed to the temporal realm can be ascribed to the eternal “timeless” one. When it is affirmed that God, the one necessary being, is immaterial, it is further affirmed that he cannot (the *he* here is itself puzzling for these writers and must be stripped of all physicalistic connotations), except by a “scandal of particularity,” involve himself in the materiate, spatial, and temporal realms. Thus arise the “paradoxes of the incarnation” creedalized at the council of Chalcedon, which insists on both the absolute humanity and the absolute divinity of Jesus Christ. Put briefly, they require that the infinite became finite, the immaterial identified itself with matter, the unchanging changed, the nontemporal submitted to time, the nonspatial entered space. When one says, “But those are incompatible,” the response is, “Of course; here is the need of faith.” Such paradoxes are not taken as flashy ways of saying things, which under analysis become reconcilable. They are instead taken as profound unresolved mysteries in the ultimate character of Being.

Roberts gloried in the recognition that the Book of Mormon doctrine of God, Christ, and the Atonement avoids not just some but all of those paradoxes. A long string of theological pseudo-problems and untenable dualisms is resolved. Among them (on which more cannot be said here):

1. Being vs. Becoming
2. Universal vs. Particular
3. Transcendence vs. Immanence
4. Spirit vs. Body
5. Spiritual vs. Temporal
6. Faith vs. Reason
7. Grace vs. Merit
8. Sacred vs. Secular
9. Other-worldly vs. This Worldly
10. Escape vs. Transformation
11. Symbolic vs. Literal

In a word, Roberts accepted the Book of Mormon doctrine (as later expanded upon by Joseph Smith) that the universe is a collection of particulars which occupy space and time and therefore can interact. It was not God, an immaterial and unconditioned being, who entered a body. It was Jesus, the first spirit Son of God the Father, who came into the world and inherited a physical body and then, moving from grace to grace, became what he became: both our exemplar and our redeemer.²⁰

Story, History, and Inseparable Links

Roberts was in many ways the most prolific of Mormon historians of the first century. At the same time, without massive tensions, he was one of its most articulate theologians. It is a left-handed tribute to Roberts that many specialized historians today find his writings too theological or, as they would say, apologetic. On the other hand, many theologians, whether they are dogmatic or speculative or even naturalistic, find his theology too historical.

He observed that in the Book of Mormon there is no yawning chasm between the Jesus of history and the Christ of faith. Well-meaning people are presently at work trying to "save" the book by denying its historical content and context. They say, "Let's treat the Book of Mormon as an allegory; take it as a collection of symbols in quasi-narrative garb. Let's call it nineteenth-century pseudepigrapha. But let's give up the quest for "external evidence."

Of course the book is rich—Roberts says far richer than we yet know—in allegory, typology, symbol, and metaphor. But external as well as internal historicity is the essence of the book. To try to disentangle it from its earthly and sometimes earthy connections, to deny its narratives, its chronology, to isolate its functions from reportage is not to save the book. It is to eviscerate it.

The question was raised by one of Roberts's contemporaries, Kierkegaard.²¹ How can one commit his or her own salvation to a mere set of historical or probabilistic judgments? Roberts answers with the Book of Mormon, "The Gospel has a history and 'the life' required in it is based upon the facts of that history" (TWL, 14).

"But," persists the critic, "we cannot recover the precise historical truth about a Moses or a Jesus." The consensus of a century of scholarship, for example in the New Testament, is that either we must be content to see Jesus through the eyes of an already distorting institution called the Christian Church or acknowledge that we cannot see him at all. Roberts answers that the peoples of the Book of Mormon left Jerusalem, not Athens. They left before the rise and canonization of Greek philosophy through Plato and Philo in Christendom and Judaism. They were prompt in recordkeeping. And they were dead and buried before the hellenization of what we call Western culture. "Take off your metaphysical glasses," Roberts pleads, in effect, "and read the Book of Mormon, which is full of plain and precious but also profound things. Cease to impose the Greek assumptions that distort and stifle." (TWL, 20.)

The Book of Mormon in modern translation is only one step removed from the bearers of revelation. These persons are real for Roberts. So are the events. They are accessible. That accessibility does not require one to retreat into mysticism, which strives to retain a claim on the divine by the final disparagement and rejection of perception. Extreme mystics want nothing to do with

the senses and if it gets in their way they will have nothing to do with reason. But prophets are not mystics in this extreme sense. Ten prophets in the Book of Mormon, as Roberts's own notebook records, encountered the living God in vision. When they say they saw and heard God, they saw and heard God. The Book of Mormon reinstates all authentic modes of religious awareness. And it does not disparage any.

This same presumption, with the Book of Mormon in the foreground, led Roberts to see to it that the modern Church came to repossess its cradle. "I feel satisfied that we are going to get added inspiration from the fact that we own our birthplace and our cradle."²² With the approval of the First Presidency (before his release 2 May 1927), he was instrumental in the recovery of the Joseph Smith farm, the Sacred Grove, the Hill Cumorah, the Peter Whitmer home, and the home in Harmony, Pennsylvania, where the Prophet completed the translation of the Book of Mormon.

"I rejoice", says Roberts in a late discourse, "that we have access to these [places]."²³ Why? Here again is the sacramental insight. These origin-events are to our profound religious impulses what the sacrament of the Restoration is to the soul: nurture and nourishment. "As the bugle to the war horse; as the sight of the flag to the patriot, and the drum-beat to the soldier," Roberts taught, a frequent . . . "recurrence to the . . . great events in which our Church had its origin give inspiration and spirit life to us."²⁴ That history for Roberts includes the story of the Book of Mormon. More than that, it includes the story *in* the Book of Mormon. That story is not a mere story, not contrived fiction. It is history. At the heart of it is Christ's story, the story of him who lived and died and lived again. In anticipation, in enactment, and in retrospect, the Book of Mormon records that monumental series of events.

Other Life Reconciliations

One can see the man Roberts—a man of commingled griefs and joys—behind his final analysis of what he called the "Fifth Gospel," 3 Nephi. A basic tension is reflected in an excerpt he made from Paley's "Two Views" of life and character:

The one possesses vigor, firmness, resolution; is daring and active, quick in its sensibilities, jealous of its fame, eager in its attachments, inflexible in its purpose, violent in its resentments.

The other is meek, yielding, complying, forgiving, not prompt to act, but willing to suffer; silent and gentle under rudeness and insult, suing for reconciliation when others would demand satisfaction, giving way to the pushes of impudence conceding and indulgent to the prejudices, the wrongheadedness, the intractability, of those with whom it has to deal.²⁵

The world venerates the first approach. Roberts pleads "Render unto Caesar what is Caesar's, to God the things that are God's." But does Christ really mean these things about cloaks and miles, and loving and praying for enemies? "Utterly impracticable," Roberts answers for the realist. "It would produce a race of mollycoddles, of non-resisting, unaggressive simpletons." The plea "Take no thought" is "wholly at variance with true economic principles and the stern requirements of common sense." (TWL, 50.)

What Roberts finds in 3 Nephi and the "American Sermon on the Mount" is two realities: On the one hand, Jesus presents to the Nephites an "intensification" of the requirements of "the Life." It is more idealistic, more perfectionistic than the parallel account in Matthew. For example, he admonishes not just against anger, "without cause," but against anger itself, "stopping it at its source." He advocates not just the first and second miles but service "with real intent." And he makes the key words of the several duties of almsgiving, prayer, and fasting "cheerfulness, lightheartedness and joy" not as if they were "burdens hard to bear." (TWL, 50.)

On the other hand, the sermon clarifies with penetrating insight the who, the when, and the what of certain requirements which are falsified when they are absolutized. The counsel "take no thought for the morrow," for example, is not for everyone. It is for the Twelve and dedicated missionaries. So, likewise, in some of its ethical reaches is the command to "turn the other cheek." The counsel on adultery of the heart is coupled with "deny yourself," not as some have supposed with a "fanatical" encouragement of self-mutilation.

More fundamental, all the counsels of the sermon remain unreachable except through a rebirth, a life derived from Christ's life. No fruits are promised without roots. The entire sermon is preceded by the requirement of baptism of fire and the Holy Ghost. Jesus' high ethic presupposes a radically altered personality, one reborn to this new life. For Roberts, the glory of it is in this sentence: "He who delivered it lived it!" (TWL, 51.)

The Sacramental Prayers

That leads to a rediscovery in Roberts's latest thought on the Book of Mormon—the two sacramental prayers. These prayers alone, he had concluded earlier, mark the Book of Mormon as authentic and divinely inspired. “The composition of them in excellence arises far above any performance that Joseph Smith could be considered equal to.”²⁶ Now he insisted they were “the most perfect forms of sacred literature to be found.”²⁷ He had earlier written that to add or subtract a word would mutilate or mar them and diminish their power. Now he described them in a way foreign to Mormon ears. They are like creeds. (TWL, 39.) By this he means that they embody, in masterful, rich, heavily freighted phrases, the whole of the gospel. They encapsulate the whole Book of Mormon. To participate in them is to enter the Holy of Holies of the Atonement. Four pages of TWL add to his earlier exposition of them.

These prayers spiritualize the physical and physicalize the spiritual. They unite the life-sufferings and death of Jesus into our frail flesh. They cry out in prayer and covenant from man's mortal condition to an Eternal Father.²⁸ They present physical realities—bread and water—to be blessed and sanctified to the soul. *Soul* does not mean, as it does in most traditions, an immaterial entity that is somehow *in* the body, “a ghost in the machine.” *Soul* is the revealed name of the spirit and body together, as Roberts says at length in a comparison and contrast account of the Book of Mormon doctrine of joy. These prayers, and the ordinances which they recapitulate, convey more than salvific grace. They transmit “powers of godliness.” We may receive into our souls his spirit. Eventually we may become like him. That is the premise and promise of the prayers—life without which there is no life—life like His.

Roberts, a man who knew how stressed and confused and sinful life can be, emphasized that the key word in the first prayer is *willing*. That is the covenant of the first prayer: Willing to take upon them His name. Willing always to remember him. Willing to keep his commandments. Finally, man may arrive at the point through this “palpable food to the soul” when he loses even the desire for sin. (TWL, 39.) That too, is an intrinsic promise of the prophets of the Book of Mormon.²⁹

So impressed was he with this that it became the conclusion of his last address. Only twenty-three days before his death,

Roberts addressed the Chicago Parliament of Religions. His subject was "Economics of the New Age."³⁰ His presentation ended with the Book of Mormon sacramental prayers. He concluded: "What could be better as the sum of all excellence? And the one thing needful for the solution of all our human woes?" (TWL, 39.)

Summary

The following inclusive paragraph sums up all Roberts had tried to say:

Spiritual life means relation to and participation in all the higher and better things, the good, the true, the beautiful, the pure, the refined, the noble, the courageous, the unselfish, the merciful, united with truth, justice, knowledge, wisdom, power, intelligence. The heart of all this, the very center and circumference of it and the life of it, is and must be God. And so to deport oneself that he is thrown out of harmony with all this, severed from fellowship with God by separation from him who is the life of all this volume of higher and better things, this body of soul quality, this ocean of righteousness is death, indeed spiritual death. It is death as real as physical death, the separation of spirit and body. (TWL, 38.)

Thus, to B. H. Roberts the Book of Mormon is in the fullest sense a matter of life and death.

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1. Personal Scripture Notebook, B. H. Roberts, Church Archives.
2. Truman G. Madsen, "The Truth, The Way, The Life," chapter 17, *Defender of the Faith* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1980), pp. 338–45.
3. Madsen, "The Meaning of Christ: The Truth, The Way and The Life: An Analysis of B. H. Roberts's Unpublished Master Work," *BYU Studies*, 15 (Spring 1975), 259–92.
4. See Foreword, *Discourses of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1948).
5. Letter of Elsa Cook, Roberts's secretary in his last years, to the author 10 February 1970.

6. This title derives from John 14:6. Roberts's notebooks show he was first impressed to use the title when singing the last verse of a classical Mormon hymn, "Prayer Is the Soul's Sincere Desire." "O Thou by Whom We Come to God, the Life, the Truth, the Way!" (No. 145 in 1985 Hymnbook.)

7. From a letter to President Heber J. Grant. See Nels B. Lundwall papers, BYU Special Collections.

8. Ibid.

9. B. H. Roberts to Heber J. Grant, 9 February 1931, Heber J. Grant Collection, Church Historical Department. In a letter to a missionary friend, he wrote on 3 March 1931, "I have been passing through the severest and mental and spiritual strain of my life during the last two months . . . concerning my manuscript, 'The Truth, The Way, and The Life.' . . . Matters, however, have not reached conclusions yet, and I still hope for a favorable decision."

10. From the handwritten title page of the preface to *Discourses of B. H. Roberts*, Elsa Cook's handwriting says, "These were President Roberts's exact words."

11. Roberts to Heber J. Grant, 9 Feb. 1931.

12. Introduction to "The Truth, The Way, The Life." (Hereafter cited in the text as TWL, chapter number.)

13. See *Seventy's Course in Theology*, Fourth Year, The Atonement (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1908).

14. TWL, 43. 2 Nephi 2:11–14; 10:23. Roberts quotes Nephi: "The first judgment which came upon man [the judgment of death, spiritual and physical] must needs have remained to an endless duration. And if so, this flesh must have laid down to rot . . . to rise no more." (2 Nephi 9:7). Again, because of the fall of Adam "all mankind were fallen, and they were in the grasp of justice; yea, the justice of law, God, which consigned them forever to be cut off from his presence" (Alma 42:14).

15. Roberts writes, "Not only must there be made satisfaction to eternal justice, but there must be the power of Deity exercised if man is to be saved from death; there must be a power of life so that that which was lost may be restored, both as to the spiritual life of man and the physical life" (TWL, 43).

16. George McDonald in C. S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York: Macmillan, 1962), preface.

17. This is a central thesis of the philosophical theology of Augustine, Anselm, and Thomas Aquinas. It remains uncontested in official Catholic, Greek Orthodox, and Protestant thought. Roberts contemplates the cost (TWL, 43).

18. The word *universe* suggests a "block-universe," but Roberts was a particularist. There is no one thing, one plenum. There are many selves, many lives, many goods, many evils (TWL, 9).

19. Roberts's section on "limitations on these powers" is in his Treatment of the "Omnis." God's eternity is without qualification. But God's omnipresence must be qualified—his Spirit permeates space but his personal presence is in some place. His omnipotence must be qualified—he has all the power that it

is possible to have in a universe of laws and free intelligences but he has not the power to create or destroy element. He is also limited and delimited by the exercise of human freedom. God's power does not extend to the creation of freedom. Freedom is an ineluctable fact (TWL, 20 and 42).

20. In chapter 20, "Departure of the Church from the True Doctrine of God," Roberts presents the formulæ and creeds, the apostle creed, the patristic view, the doctrine of trinities, the Nicene creed, the Athanasian creed, all of which "stray from the plain anthropomorphism of the New Testament revelation of God through Jesus Christ." This has pagan origin and Roberts cites scholars who acknowledge that the notion that the conception of God is "pure being," "immaterial," "without form" "or parts or passion" has its origin in philosophy, not in Jewish or Christian revelation."

21. S. Kierkegaard in *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, trans. by David F. Swenson (Princeton: Princeton University Press for American Scandinavian Foundation).

22. *Conference Report*, October 1926, p. 127.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

24. *Ibid.*, pp. 124–25.

25. Roberts's Personal Scripture Notebook, under "Views of Life and Character," Church Archives.

26. See *New Witnesses*, 3:489.

27. See "The sacrament of the Lord's supper" (TWL, 39). "In the Book of Mormon is given a most dramatic and soul-thrilling testimony to the resurrection of the Christ by the appearance of the risen Redeemer to a multitude of people in America, shortly after the resurrection of the Christ; thus to the people of America no less than to the people of the Eastern Hemisphere, did God give assurances through their ancient prophets from time to time of the existence of his gospel and of power unto salvation; and lastly the risen Christ came to them to assure them of the verities of the Plan of Salvation and especially of this feature of it, the Resurrection from the dead, by his own glorious appearance among them, and his quite extended ministry among them. (For all which, see Book of 3 Nephi, the whole book, but especially chapter 11.)" See also his stake conference addresses of January, March, and April 1931 and April and August 1932. In each he occasionally discoursed on these "prayers perfect."

28. TWL, 39. "Eternal Father" for example means to Roberts not first cause as in the classical view, but eternal continuing cause and eternal sustaining power; not the Aristotelian unmoved mover, but the "most moved mover," the most touched, the most impressed, the most compassionate.

29. This means to Roberts that the gospel cannot be reduced to an ethic only. It is a religion of transformation.

30. See his "Economics of the New Age" in *Discourses of B. H. Roberts* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1948), p. 7.