

### A Mature and Polished Treatise

*The Truth, The Way, The Life, An Elementary Treatise on Theology: The Masterwork of B. H. Roberts.* Edited by Stan Larson; forewords by Thom D. Roberts and Leonard J. Arrington; introductions by Sterling M. McMurrin and Erich Robert Paul (San Francisco: Smith Research Associates, 1994).

*The Truth, The Way, The Life, An Elementary Treatise on Theology by B. H. Roberts.* Edited by John W. Welch; introductions by John W. Welch, Davis Bitton, Gary Layne Hatch, Doris R. Dant, Truman G. Madsen, David L. Paulsen, William E. Evenson, William J. Hamblin, David Rolph Seely, Andrew C. Skinner, Richard C. Roberts, Michael D. Rhodes, and James B. Allen (Provo, UT: BYU Studies, 1994); reissued in 1996 with changes in the introductory essays, which were placed at the end of the book rather than at the beginning.

Reviewed by Kent E. Robson, Professor of Philosophy, Utah State University, Logan.

WHAT ARE THE GREATEST BOOKS ever written within Mormonism? Without question, one would name *Jesus the Christ* and *The Articles of Faith* by James E. Talmage. Alternatively, one might think of *Evidences and Reconciliations* by John A. Widtsoe, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* by Spencer W. Kimball, or *A Marvelous Work and a Wonder* by LeGrand Richards. *Gospel Doctrine* by Joseph F. Smith might be

mentioned because of its use in priesthood lessons, or *The Seventy's Course in Theology* by B. H. Roberts used for five years in priesthood classes but now hard to find. There are others, of course, but these are important sources—they are continually used and considered relevant.

To a great extent, these books are examined and considered to be sources of doctrine. We don't define them as scriptures, but many of them are important for their doctrinal and theological implications. Because of that, we don't even ask when they were written. To some degree, they are timeless.

To the above list, we should now add this wonderful, mature treatise by B. H. Roberts, *The Truth, The Way, The Life*. This is a book that should be in the hands of all members of the church and should be used regularly by them. After all the books written by Roberts for the church, this is his most mature and most polished treatise on the essential doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. This is also the way Roberts viewed his work, and, as a member of the seven presidents of the Seventy, his views carried enormous weight. I believe they should still be given enormous credence.

Furthermore, I believe Roberts was essentially right. This book should be used alongside of *The Articles of Faith* (and others), and should

never again be neglected. There is only one section of chapters that is controversial, and that can easily be skipped by members as speculative. It is tragic that others did not feel that members of the church are intelligent enough and capable of discrimination, so that this wonderful book might not have been held back for over sixty-five years. Many have said the work is outdated, but would we say that *Jesus the Christ* is outdated just because it was written so long ago? Surely not! As John Welch says in his introduction, this work is an "encyclopedia" (xvi). It surpasses the new *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* in its brevity, clarity, and profound insight into issue after issue. This is a book that must be referred to time after time, and used by all serious members of the church. My only disappointment has to do with how long it has taken this book to be published.

The fact that two different publishers and editors have brought the book out now is wonderful, for it helps to indicate the enormous interest that this treatise generates. That it has not been previously reviewed in these pages only indicates the enormity of the importance of the work and the fact that the two editions together exceed 1,300 pages of subtle complexity and interesting discussion. Also, two of the commentators of the work, Sterling M. McMurrin and Erich Robert Paul, are now deceased, and this represents an immense loss within Mormonism.

Introductions in the Stan Larson version take up 67 pages. They include forewords by Thom D. Roberts and Leonard J. Arrington and then the superb essays by McMurrin and Paul. Although McMurrin is discouraged with the "biblical literalism" of Rob-

erts, he concludes that "B. H. Roberts's high level of sophistication as a historian, his sagacity as a philosopher, his profound insight as a theologian [and] his commitment to the worth of scientific knowledge" mark his work as bringing to the world a serious "inquiring into the nature and meaning of Mormonism" (xxiii-xxv). Paul focuses on Roberts's views about science, and in item after item his views still stand, for example, on the indestructibility of "matter-energy." Here we see that Roberts was in a line of Mormon scientists-philosophers-theologians that included Orson Pratt and Orson Hyde and that had almost died out before McMurrin and Paul.

Here Roberts has many important things to say that can be largely lost on those interested solely in history. In this way, Roberts's work is profoundly distinguished from the *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* with its largely historical emphasis. (There are some exceptions in the encyclopedia.) A superb introduction is provided by Stan Larson, and it is careful, accurate, and detailed. It also describes an attempt to work together with John Welch, but Welch decided against a joint effort.

Welch has provided about 207 pages of introduction in his volume and emphasized that Roberts is one of the "great intellects of the Church" (xxvi). Davis Bitton is too dismissive, but Truman Madsen, with his deeper understanding of theology, etc., is more laudatory, for example, when he discusses Roberts's views on "Spirits and Intelligence" (lxxxiv, for example). David L. Paulsen also appreciates and understands Roberts's importance as a theologian, has important discussions of Eternalism and Causality, and has understood the

pivotal importance of the problem of evil and how Mormons may address it. There are also criticisms of Roberts by scientist Evenson, but his work contains important confusions and inadequacies, for example, when he talks of "beautiful and consistent mathematical theories" (cxix). Kurt Godel showed us in 1931 that all mathematical theories are complete only if they are inconsistent, and consistent only if they are incomplete. James B. Allen publishes an extremely important account as to why and how Roberts's work was not previously published. All in all, these essays are an important introduction to this vitally critical work.

Finally, little can be written in a review of this wonderful and important treatise. Let me draw attention to

one example to illustrate the importance of this publication. In chapter 2, for example, Roberts describes man "as existing" (22, Larson; 29, Welch). This is important, for we see that man is not "created" as other denominations claim, and this makes it possible to seriously claim that man is free or has "free agency" (24, Larson; 31, Welch). Roberts is addressing something most critically important here and he picks it up in chapter 8 when he talks of the "Eternity of Intelligences" and says that "intelligences are eternal—are among the uncreated things—and the indestructible things" (81-83, Larson; 81-83, Welch).

This one example alone shows the sophistication and depth of Roberts, and his insight should continually guide our understanding of Mormonism.

## Hypertextual Book of Mormon Study

*Book of Mormon Reference Library*, CD-ROM for Macintosh and Windows (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1995).

*Book of Mormon Studybase*, for Windows (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1995).

*LDS Classics CD-ROM*, CD-ROM for DOS (San Diego: Research Applications International, 1995).

*LDS Collectors Library 1995 Edition*, CD-ROM for Windows (Provo, UT: Infobases, 1995).

*Sunstone on Disk: 1974-1994*, 3.5 Disks for DOS (Salt Lake City: Sunstone Foundation, 1994).

*Ultimate LDS Library on CD-ROM*, for

Windows (American Fork, UT: Portals, 1995).

Reviewed by Brent Lee Metcalfe, Senior Online Information Specialist, Novell, Inc., editor of *New Approaches to the Book of Mormon: Explorations in Critical Methodology*.

BOOK OF MORMON CRITICISM IS entering an era envisioned by hypertext pioneer Vannevar Bush in 1945 in which

[w]holly new forms of encyclopedias will appear, ready-made with a mesh of associative trails running through them . . . The historian, with a vast chronological account of a people, par-