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**B. H. Roberts ca. 1927.** After his release as mission president in 1927, Roberts devoted himself almost exclusively for six months in New York to working on *The Truth, The Way, The Life*. His conception of the work expanded, and he was still composing and revising this *Elementary Treatise on Theology* a year later. Courtesy LDS Church Archives.

# Theology

(Chs. 6–7, 13, 20, 23, 42)

David L. Paulsen

Roberts unfolds his understanding of God and of the Godhead within a metaphysical worldview grounded in the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith but supplemented and amplified by ideas drawn from the science of his day. While it is evident that Roberts had considerable respect for scientific theory, he explicitly acknowledges that he takes *only* the scriptures as “conclusive authorities” (69). Yet in his initial presentation of his metaphysical and theological theses, he relies heavily on both reason and scientific theory and deliberately makes very little appeal to uniquely LDS scriptures.<sup>1</sup> Why so? The answer is found, I believe, in his introduction to the treatise, where he queries: “Is there a truth, a way, a life that can be made to appeal to reason as well as to faith? Can it be made to satisfy the understanding as well as the longings of the human heart?” (16).<sup>2</sup> *TWL* is intended as a resounding affirmation to the questions posed. That is, he is writing to show that science, reason, and the Bible combine to corroborate the truth of the restored gospel. His project is that of St. Anselm: faith seeking understanding.

In this introductory essay, I first outline Roberts’s LDS worldview or metaphysics and then his understanding of God and the Godhead, showing the intimate links between his theology and his metaphysics. My purposes are primarily expository and explanatory; evaluation is an important task largely deferred.

## **Roberts’s LDS Worldview: The Doctrine of Eternalism**

Roberts calls the worldview developed from his sources the doctrine of eternalism. It is the doctrine that whatever most fundamentally exists now—space, time, matter, energy, intelligences; in sum, the universe—has always existed. In Joseph Smith’s teachings, this doctrine is implicitly

embedded<sup>3</sup> and, in part, even explicitly articulated, the clearest statement being found in Joseph's watershed address, the "King Follett Discourse."<sup>4</sup> But consistent with Roberts's apparent apologetic aims, he cites no LDS sources. Instead, he supports the doctrine with both *a priori* reasoning and scientific theory. Rationally, he argues that the unboundedness of space and time and the uncreatability and indestructibility of mass-energy are necessary truths, in the sense that their negations are inconceivable (69–70). Scientifically, he finds the doctrine vindicated by the principle of the conservation of matter.<sup>5</sup>

Roberts argues for several principles which are closely related to the doctrine of eternalism. These include (1) creation as organization, (2) the reign of law, (3) agentive causality, (4) immanent as opposed to transcendent teleology, and (5) eternal cause as opposed to first cause. Let us briefly consider each as we attempt to elucidate Roberts's metaphysics. In doing so, understanding will be sharpened by contrasting Roberts's views with the mainline Christian tradition.

**Creation as Organization.** Christians have traditionally understood God to have created all things, including humans and the material universe, out of nothing.<sup>6</sup> But it follows from the doctrine of eternalism that God did not (indeed, cannot) produce the universe out of nothing. It has always existed. If so, how then is God the Creator? Roberts no doubt finds his answer to this question in the King Follett discourse, where Joseph Smith explicitly repudiates the doctrine of creation *ex nihilo* and affirms that God creates by organizing pre-existing materials into new patterns or structures.<sup>7</sup> Joseph taught:

You ask the learned doctors why they say the world was made out of nothing; and they will answer, "Doesn't the Bible say He *created* the world?" And they infer, from the word create, that it must have been made out of nothing. Now, the word *create* came from the word *baurau* which does not mean to create out of nothing; it means to organize; the same as a man would organize materials and build a ship. Hence, we infer that God had materials to organize the world out of chaos—chaotic matter, which is element. . . . Element had an existence from the time he had. The pure principles of element are principles which can never be destroyed; they may be organized and re-organized, but not destroyed. They had no beginning, and can have no end.<sup>8</sup>

Roberts illustrates how such creative reorganization of existing materials may result in new substances with unique properties. Water, for example, is not produced out of nothing but from two molecules of hydrogen bonding with one molecule of oxygen. The emergent substance, water, has properties which are not possessed by either oxygen or hydrogen (60).

**Reign of Law.** Roberts concurs with several cited authorities that “the impressive thing about the universe is . . . the fact of order within it” (61). The order to which he refers is causal order (or regularity of temporal sequence). This regularity is the foundation of science and enables one to predict the future, interpret the past, and to understand the present. Roberts quotes John Fiske: “So beautiful is all this orderly coherence, so satisfying to some of our intellectual needs, that many minds are inclined to doubt if anything more can be said of the universe than that it is a Reign of Law, an endless aggregate of coexistences and sequences” (62).<sup>9</sup>

**Agentive Causality.** Is nature’s orderliness *all* that can be said of it? Is its lawlike structure inherent in the very nature of uncreate matter and hence an ultimate fact? Roberts answers these questions in the negative, pointing rather to agentive causality as at least co-ultimate. And here Roberts introduces a different kind of order into his picture of the world—teleological order, or the agentive adaptation of means to ends. His account of the agentive causality which gives teleological order is clear and illuminating:

In fact, man finds within himself the nearest approach to a *vera causa*—a true, or real cause. How does this power of causation proceed with and through him? He is *in* the world with all that environs him—a world of things and forces are about him. He conceives the notion of building a house. If he builds it he will be the efficient cause of its existence; but this power of causation of which he is self-conscious, as resident within himself, he finds to be subject to his will. He may or may not conclude to build the house—it will be just as he chooses. But he concludes to build it, to suit his convenience and to meet his felt needs. He did not have to create out of nothing the things of which he made the house, they already existed; all that he had to do was to effect certain changes in materials about him, assemble them in a certain order, and the house is completed. The builder caused its existence. In all this procedure, the mind of the man that was operating as a power of causation, was operating somewhat as a mind anywhere might act where like conditions obtained—as eternal mind might be found acting or causing. *The man was acting as the intelligent factor in causation.* (75; italics added)<sup>10</sup>

Granted that an agent may have such causal efficacy, is this causal efficacy merely exercised through a system of uncreate causal laws, or is the system of laws *itself* the product of ordering intelligence? On this issue, Roberts seems unsure or at least unclear. On the typescript of the final draft of the manuscript, he wrote: “For a reign of law observed in the universe suggests something more of which the reign of law is *but the effect*, namely, Mind, Intelligence” (62–63; italics added). Here, Roberts seems to imply that nature’s causal orderedness

is *solely* the effect of mind, and that agent causality or personal explanation is ultimate.

That this is Roberts's view, however, is made doubtful by his revision of the text just quoted. In his final reading of that draft of the manuscript, he amended the passage just cited to read: "For a reign of law . . . *suggests* something more of which the reign of law is but *a part and not the whole*; namely, Mind, Intelligence" (62–63; italics added). Notice here he does not *assert* that nature's orderedness is "but the effect" of intelligence. He describes it only as "a part and not the whole" of what is. Nonetheless, Roberts still asserts that the reign of law *suggests* mind. This leaves interestingly open the question of causal order's origin, if any,<sup>11</sup> and its relationship to mind. To what extent does God simply find causal-orderedness ready at hand and utilize it in achieving his ends and to what extent does he produce that very order? While Roberts does not definitively answer this question, his discussion of related issues suggests a possible answer: *some* (as opposed to all or none) of the world's actual causal-orderedness is due to divine design. This answer emerges in Roberts's discussions of (1) the mode of God's creative activity and (2) miracles. The former discussion suggests that mind may be *a* source of causal order, and the latter that mind is not the sole source.

*Mode of Creation.* Two points are relevant here. First, Roberts claimed that since space, time, matter, energy, and spirit are all eternal, "'creation' can only consist of certain events or changes in, and within, these eternal existences" (60).<sup>12</sup> Second, by giving the example of combining hydrogen and oxygen, Roberts illustrated how God might create water. While the properties of hydrogen and oxygen give rise to regularities of temporal sequence, so also do the novel properties of water. Roberts's example shows how God's creative activity *might* produce new regularities within a world already having some causal structure.<sup>13</sup>

*Miracles.* Further, Roberts's account of miracles (63–65) seemingly coheres best with the interpretation that not *all* causal order is mind produced. For had Roberts concluded that event causality is *totally* contingent on mind, then it would seemingly follow that mind could suspend the operation of event causality. Indeed, Christians traditionally understand a miracle to be such a divine suspension or violation of natural law. But Roberts rejects this conception of a miracle. He writes: "This resolving of miracles into events or effects contrary to the established constitution and course of things, or a deviation from the known laws of nature, is a wrong viewpoint. What is especially faulty in this definition of miracles is that they are held to be outside of or

contrary to the laws of nature” (64). Rather, miracles, Roberts argues, are interpositions in the normal course of events by agents employing laws not yet understood by those to whom the interposition appears miraculous. His example is helpful. An old mariner who knew only wind and ocean currents as motive powers for a ship might find a modern steamship speeding forward in the face of both wind and ocean current miraculous, even though the phenomenon is perfectly explicable by other observers in terms of known natural laws (64).<sup>14</sup> The view that mind—even a divine mind—is incapable of suspending operation of natural laws suggests that at least some causal order may exist independently of mind and thus be coeternal with it as an ultimate explanatory principle. Roberts’s total analysis points to this conclusion.

**Immanent vs. Transcendent Teleology.** Whatever the ultimate status of causal-orderedness, Roberts sees it as “the means through which Intelligence is working to the achievement of some high purpose” (63). Mind is the source of teleological order. Since within our own experience we find intelligence or mind increasingly dominating matter, adapting or conforming it to our ends, we might reasonably suppose that the same telos-ordering process is going on within the larger cosmos (75). But here again, the doctrine of eternalism suggests a departure from classical teleology. For the traditional theist, the universe as a totality has been brought into being by a purposing intelligent Creator who transcends or exists outside it. But the God revealed in the Restoration exists within, not outside, the universe. He is at work within an environment that is given even to him, ever shaping or fitting it more perfectly to his ends. Here, then, is an insight that will illuminate the problem of evil: God is not responsible for creating evil; rather, evil arises from the inherent nature of men and from their volitions.<sup>15</sup> Roberts uses a similar mode of analogical reasoning to suggest a cooperative teleology in which a plurality of minds united in a common end might operate as intelligent cause of the creative changes occurring within the universe (76).

**Eternal Cause vs. First Cause.** Did God’s creative activity have a beginning or has he been eternally engaged in ordering self-existent chaos? Christians, generally, believe that God as the only self-existent being produced the world at some moment in time or timelessly produced both world and time. In either case, both the world and time have a beginning, and God is their uncaused “first cause.”<sup>16</sup> Roberts finds rational difficulties in this idea. The mind, he argues, cannot come to rest in the conception of an endless chain of cause-effects or in a first cause that somehow initiates the whole process. Nor

can the mind rest in the idea of a time when there was no cause as seemingly implied by the idea of a first cause.

In accord with his doctrine of eternalism, Roberts affirms that there is not only no beginning to the universe, but similarly no beginning to God's creative activity:

All this, with eternal mind as eternal power of causation in all its phases present—change and development, what we call creation and progress, may go on as it has eternally been going on without beginning and without end. (76)

Roberts sees the idea of eternally operating causes constantly present and acting within an eternal universe to be “more rational than the conception of a ‘first cause,’ followed by secondary causes. . . . And ‘causation’ when regarded as eternal” and intelligent, supports “the conception of the dominance of mind over matter as completely as when the universe and its phenomena are accounted for by the conception” of God as first cause (71).

### **God and the Godhead<sup>17</sup>**

Armed with this understanding of Roberts's metaphysics, we shall now address more particularly his understanding of God and the Godhead, attempting to see the linkage between his metaphysics and his theology. Among the uncreated agents or intelligences there are three who are supreme and together constitute the Godhead—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Again, Roberts's theology will be compared and contrasted with that of mainline Christian orthodoxy.

**The Godhead.** Roberts sees the resurrected Christ—a spirit and a body in human form, indissolubly united—as model and prototype for his understanding of God and the Godhead (188), and seemingly with scriptural warrant. For when Philip asked the yet-to-be-resurrected Jesus to show him the Father, Jesus answered: “Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip? he that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9). Further to the same point, the author of the epistle to the Hebrews describes the *resurrected* Christ as being in “the brightness of [God's] glory, and the express image of his person” (Heb. 1:2–3). Since in Christ dwelleth the fullness of the Godhead bodily (Col. 2:9; see also 1:15–19), Christ provides the fullest revelation of what the Father is like.

Again, consistent with his purpose, Roberts draws only, and persuasively, on New Testament scripture to support his understanding of the Godhead. His views are clearly set out and represent what seems to be the standard LDS conception of the Godhead.



The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are three separate persons or individuals—three distinct centers of consciousness. And each is divine or God.<sup>18</sup> Together they constitute the supreme governing and creating power on our earth and in its heavens.<sup>19</sup> The Son was with the Father prior to the creation of the world, and the Holy Ghost proceeds from the Father.<sup>20</sup> So far, Roberts's account of the Trinity mirrors closely that of orthodox Christian theology. But still relying on New Testament scripture exclusively, he persuasively justifies two LDS departures from Christian orthodoxy: the nature of the Godhead's oneness and God's humanlike embodiment (188–90).

Traditional Christians hold that the three persons constitute one God in that they together constitute one metaphysical substance or entity. Roberts's conception of their tri-*unity* is seemingly much less problematic. He suggests that the three members of the Godhead constitute one social unit—they are perfectly united in purpose and will.<sup>21</sup>

In defending the doctrine of divine embodiment,<sup>22</sup> Roberts affirms that the Son is in the express image of his Father's person. Thus, whoever sees him has seen the Father, not because he and the Father are the same individual, but because Christ is a perfect revelation of the Father. Indeed, it is part of Christ's *mission* to so reveal the Father. He is a revelation of the *kind* of being God is. The New Testament represents God as anthropomorphic—like man in bodily form; that is, it reaffirms the doctrine found in Genesis, namely, that man is created in the image of God and after his likeness.<sup>23</sup> Not only does God have a humanlike body, he also possesses what are called human-mind-like qualities and feelings—powers of knowing, willing, feeling, loving, and so forth.<sup>24</sup> Unlike our human bodies and powers, however, God's body and powers are perfect. Roberts suggests that just as God in the resurrection will fashion our "vile bodies" (191) to be like his glorious body, so he will fashion or transform our imperfect minds to be like his.

After attempting to demonstrate on the basis of New Testament confessional and other passages the pristine Christian (and LDS) understanding of God and the Godhead, Roberts traces its development via the Apostles' Creed, the Apostolic Fathers. Finally, he traces its radical transformation in the Nicene, Athanasian, Chalcedonian, and subsequent creeds, identifying Neoplatonism, Oriental mysticism, and political expediencies as among the interplaying forces that led to the "paganization" of the New Testament vision of God.

In particular, he points out that during the first few centuries of the Christian era Christians were detested and Christianity proscribed. Survival needs alone pressed Christians to assimilate and accommodate the dominant cultural ideas. Whenever it could be shown that under

the new symbols the Church was really teaching the same doctrines that the older philosophies did, such a demonstration was regarded as a distinct gain to Christianity. “In a short time, we have the alleged followers of Christ involved in all the metaphysical disputations of the age” (195).<sup>25</sup>

**The Attributes of God.** Roberts divides the attributes into two groups: what I shall call “the moral perfections” and “the power predicates.” Among the former, he includes holiness, truth, justice, mercy, and love; and among the latter, eternity, immutability, omnipotence, omniscience, and omnipresence. His explication of the moral perfections seems straightforward, clear, and uncontroversial, squaring with both LDS and standard Christian understanding. But his explication of the power predicates departs rather radically from Christian orthodoxy and, at points, differs from views endorsed by other LDS thinkers. It is important to note here that Roberts sees the power predicates as being *intrinsically* limited. This implies that the limitations which Roberts describes in his discussion of deity inheres in the nature of the attributes *themselves* and not in God’s attainment of them. With this understanding, let’s examine his discussion of the power predicates with some care.

*Eternity.* In a tradition that stretches within Christendom back to Augustine and Boethius in the fifth century and within Western culture farther back to such non-Christian thinkers as Plotinus (second century Neoplatonist), Philo (Jewish Platonist contemporary with Jesus) and Parmenides (fifth century B.C. pre-Socratic), God’s eternity has been understood to mean his total transcendence of time. That is, to say that God is eternal is to say that he is timeless, that he exists outside of time altogether. For example, when Augustine was once asked, “What was God doing before he created the world?” he quipped, “Creating a hell for cavaliers who ask such foolish questions!” He hastened to explain that there was no time before God created the world since time itself was a dimension of the created order. God exists timelessly. Similarly, Boethius defined divine eternity as “the simultaneous possession of interminable life.” God’s life does not proceed or unfold sequentially, as our lives apparently do, but encompasses the interminable whole all at once. Thus, for God there is no past, present, and future. He has no history. He has neither temporal location nor temporal duration.<sup>26</sup>

Advancing a corollary of the doctrine of eternalism which affirms that time is an uncreate constituent of uncreate reality, Roberts rejects the mainline doctrine of divine eternity, holding that God is temporally (not timelessly) eternal. As temporally eternal, God is everlasting; he is without beginning or end and exists in never-ending time.<sup>27</sup> This view impacts profoundly on Roberts’s understanding of the other power predicates.

*Immutability.* The orthodox Christian doctrine that God is immutable or unchangeable is based upon both logical argument and biblical interpretation. Logically, change requires at least two locations in time, for that which changes must come to differ in some respect from what it was at some earlier time. Given that God has *no* location in time, it would be logically impossible for him to change. Similarly, Christian theologians, in an argument borrowed from Plato, have deduced God's unchangeability from his perfection. If a being were to change it would change either for the better or for the worse. God is perfect or complete. A being which is perfect cannot change for the better (if it could, it would not be perfect), neither could it change for the worse (if it could, it would not be perfect). Thus, a perfect being could not change at all.

Roberts rejects the major premises on which the above arguments are based: the assumptions that God is timeless and that perfection is static completeness. But what, then, of the scriptural declarations that God is unchanging? To say that God is unchanging leaves open the question of whether he is unchanging in all respects or some respects. Roberts chooses the latter option.<sup>28</sup> He proposes that scriptural affirmations of God's immutability should be understood as "stability, adherence to principle . . . fixed devotion to law . . . working through law to achievement of his divine purposes" (416). But this kind of immutability is perfectly consistent, Roberts claims, with process and progress in the divine life. God can and does increase endlessly in glory and kingdoms. Absolute immutability "would reduce God to a condition eternally static . . . [and] bar [him] from participation in that enlargement of kingdoms and increasing glory that comes from redemption and the progress of man" (417). Roberts suggests that God may be eternally self-surpassing in other respects as well. He writes, "And is it too bold a thought, that with this progress, even for the mightiest, new thoughts, and new vistas may appear, inviting to new adventures and enterprises that will yield new experiences, advancement and enlargement, even for the Most High[?]" (417).<sup>29</sup>

*Omnipotence.* In a tradition that goes back at least to Thomas Aquinas, Christian theologians have typically defined omnipotence as the power to do anything that is possible absolutely, where "possible absolutely" means logically possible. This formulation of divine omnipotence coheres with the premise that God is the absolute creator of whatever exists, for, in this case, there is nothing that exists externally to or independently of God that could serve as limit, constraint, or condition to his will. Roberts sees that the doctrine of eternalism has implications for our understanding of divine omnipotence. For from

Joseph's teaching that there are realities coeternal with God, it follows that there are ontological,<sup>30</sup> as opposed to merely logical,<sup>31</sup> conditions on what God can do. Roberts reasons: "Not even God may have two mountain ranges without a valley between. Not even God may place himself beyond the boundary of space: nor on the outside of duration. Nor . . . create space or annihilate matter" (418). Since "eternal existences" limit or condition even God, how, then, should God's omnipotence be defined? Roberts proposes that divine omnipotence be understood as the power to do anything in harmony with the natures of eternal existences (418).<sup>32</sup>

*Omniscience.* Similarly, given Joseph Smith's metaphysics, Roberts suggests that Latter-day Saints ought to qualify the traditional understanding of God's omniscience. Historically, Christians have understood that God has absolute knowledge—not only of the past and the present but of the future, including the future free choices and decisions of personal agents. Without indicating whether or why he finds this idea problematic, Roberts proposes an alternative rendering of the meaning of divine omniscience. To say that God is omniscient is to affirm that he is all-knowing in the sense that he knows everything that is known. But since that which is known is neither static nor complete, God's knowledge is neither static nor complete. As the universe developmentally unfolds, so does God's awareness of it.<sup>33</sup>

## **Conclusion**

This brief essay hardly does justice to Roberts's fundamental metaphysical and theological presuppositions. For example, it has given scant attention to his interesting conjectures about a plurality of gods and worlds (see chapter 23 and my footnote 19). On this and other omitted items, his text for now must speak for itself. This essay may suffice, however, to show how radically Roberts's worldview and his corresponding understanding of God differ from those of more classical Christian thinkers. Perhaps as clearly as any other Latter-day Saint, Roberts grasped the Prophet Joseph's doctrine of eternalism; and, perhaps more rigorously than any other, he drew out its implications and wove them into a comprehensive worldview within which God and his plan of salvation might be understood. Whatever the final assessment of this worldview's truth may be, it will no doubt remain a noteworthy model of faith seeking understanding.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>In this regard, Roberts stated, “It is my general policy in the thought-development of my theme to hold in reserve the introduction of the teachings of Joseph Smith with reference to the subject matter of these introductory chapters” (66).

<sup>2</sup>Elsewhere in his treatise, Roberts quotes liberally from latter-day scriptures, thus presupposing an LDS audience. How is this inconsistency to be explained? Roberts’s masterwork, I submit, is an amalgam of different pieces written for different purposes and different audiences. When these different materials were brought together in a comprehensive treatise, they were not finally integrated into a fully unified work—hence the variableness in Roberts’s choice of sources.

<sup>3</sup>For example, Joseph’s teaching that the members of the Godhead are both self-existent and materially embodied beings seemingly entails that space, time, and matter are self-existent.

<sup>4</sup>This was the sermon given by Joseph at the funeral of King Follett, a Church member who lost his life working on the Nauvoo Temple. The funeral was held in conjunction with the April 1844 conference of the Church. The text of the sermon was first published on August 15, 1844, in *Times and Seasons*, reprinted with notes in Joseph Fielding Smith, comp., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1965), 342–62; and in Andrew F. Ehat and Lyndon W. Cook, comps. and eds., *The Words of Joseph Smith* (Provo, Utah: Religious Studies Center, 1980), 340–62.

<sup>5</sup>Roberts’s doctrine of eternalism—especially his view that space, time, and matter are beginningless—no longer enjoys the scientific support it had at the beginning of the century. Big bang cosmology, presently the most respected scientific theory of the origin of the universe, posits a beginning for space and time and possibly for matter. For a discussion of the implications of big bang cosmology for Robert’s theology, see pages 636–41 below.

<sup>6</sup>Incidentally, the doctrine is nowhere taught in the Bible, but apparently was invented by Christians in the second century A.D., in their controversies with the Gnostics. See, for example, Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation, and the Continuum* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1983), 194. The same conclusion was reached by David Winston, “The Book of Wisdom’s Theory of Cosmogony,” in *History of Religions* 11 (November 1971): 185–202. The notion was first introduced by the Christian Neoplatonist Tatian in *Ad Grecos*, 5, and by Theophilus of Antioch in *Ad Autolyicum* 2, 4, and 10, circa A.D. 185.

<sup>7</sup>See my footnote 4. Roberts’s ideas about creation are fairly common among LDS authorities. See Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 158, 350; John A. Widtsoe, comp., *Discourses of Brigham Young* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1978), 18, 48–50, 258–59; Orson Pratt in *Journal of Discourses*, 26 vols. (Liverpool: F. D. Richards, 1855), 19:286; John Taylor, *The Gospel Kingdom* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1943), 112; John A. Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1960), 150; and Hugh B. Brown, *Conference Report*, April 1964, 82, and October 1966, 101.

<sup>8</sup>Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 350–52.

<sup>9</sup>On this point, Roberts departs from his policy of not citing LDS sources and in support of “the reign of law” quotes D&C 88:37–44.

<sup>10</sup>Analogously, Roberts explains, a group or community of minds may cooperatively work together as a unit in constructing a city. The group of people supposedly cause their city, just as the one man caused his house to come into existence.

<sup>11</sup>The question as to whether causal order was originated should not be confused with the questions of whether God is the cause of all things and whether there is a beginning to God's creative activity.

<sup>12</sup>On the eternal existence of matter and mind, see D&C 93:29; Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 158; Widtsoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 48–50, 258–59; Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 150; and Orson Pratt in *Journal of Discourses* 19:286.

<sup>13</sup>Roberts in chapter 6 seems to be making three claims about the nature of the universe. They are:

1. There is no limit to space;
2. Matter, energy, and mind or spirit have always existed and will always exist; and
3. Creation is merely the combination or recombination of these eternally existing things.

Claims two and three basically accord with what scientists believe today, with two added provisions. The first is that the distinction between matter and energy is not so clear. Matter can be made into energy and, in theory, energy can be transformed into matter. The second is that contemporary scientists tend to doubt that there is a distinction between mind and matter. Yet none would deny that matter-energy has always existed and will continue to do so forever. So claim two is not totally out of harmony with science. However, claim one is more problematic. In the current standard model of the universe, the cosmos was once a tiny point—obviously this constitutes at least one point where the universe was limited in some sense. However, according to what many scientists believe about the universe now, it would seem that the universe will continue expanding forever. Hence, in some sense, claim one also agrees with the current cosmological model.

<sup>14</sup>Roberts's understanding of miracles is common among Church authorities. See Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation*, 3 vols. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1954–56), 2:314; James E. Talmage, *The Articles of Faith* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1984), 200 (in other editions, see "Miracles," chapter 12); Widtsoe, *Evidences and Reconciliations*, 129–30. Either explicitly or implicitly, each of these authors supports Roberts's belief that the universe is governed by laws. With the belief in the reign of law, they all come to the reasonable conclusion that miracles are not violations of law, but operations we do not understand. For example, on page 200, Talmage writes: "Miracles are commonly regarded as occurrences in opposition to the laws of nature. Such a conception is plainly erroneous, for the laws of nature are inviolable. However, as human understanding of these laws is at best but imperfect, events strictly in accordance with natural law may appear contrary thereto."

<sup>15</sup>See pages 609–13 above.

<sup>16</sup>Although versions of the first-cause argument can be found in the writings of Plato and Aristotle, the classic Christian formulation of the argument is found in the famous five ways of Thomas Aquinas (1225–74). See his *Summa Theologiae*.

<sup>17</sup>Roberts's other sustained works on the LDS understanding of God include *The Mormon Doctrine of Deity: The Roberts–Van Der Donckt Discussion* and *The Seventy's Course in Theology*, vol. 3. Almost all of his material on God and the Godhead is taken from these two earlier works.

<sup>18</sup>For references to the Holy Ghost as God or deity, see Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, 370; G. Homer Durham, ed., *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1969), 5; and Edward L. Kimball, ed., *The Teachings of Spencer W. Kimball* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1982), 4.

<sup>19</sup>In chapter 23, from his analysis of what he calls the Mosaic and Abrahamic fragments (published now in the Pearl of Great Price), Roberts concludes that these revelations, and all revelations given to seers on our world, are local only—that is, they pertain only to our earth and (without attempting to specify how far they might extend) its heavens. Our Godhead, then, constitutes the supreme governing council for our world or world system. Roberts conjectures that other worlds or world systems may each have a presiding council or presidency comparable to our Godhead, and that progressively vaster systems of worlds may also be governed by “a number of divine, and of course, harmonized Intelligences” (224). Proceeding forth from these divine intelligences to fill the immensity of space is an intelligence-inspiring and world-sustaining power which Roberts calls “the Spirit of God,” and on our earth, “The Light of Christ.” In this way, Roberts suggests, God is immanent in the world and omnipresent in both power and knowledge. With this brief speculative excursion into worlds beyond our own, Roberts focuses again on our Godhead—the only gods with whom we have to deal.

<sup>20</sup>As to what “proceeds from the Father” may mean, Roberts is content to merely repeat the New Testament language without any attempt to explicate its meaning.

<sup>21</sup>This view, now called social trinitarianism, is winning increasing acceptance among Christian theologians. See, for example, Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., “Social Trinity and Tritheism,” and David Brown, “Trinitarian Personhood and Individuality,” both in Ronald J. Feenstra and Cornelius Plantinga, Jr., eds., *Trinity, Incarnation, and Atonement* (Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989).

<sup>22</sup>For recent defenses of the doctrine of divine embodiment, see David L. Paulsen, “Early Christian Belief in a Corporeal Deity: Origen and Augustine as Reluctant Witnesses,” *Harvard Theological Review* 83 (April 1990): 105–16; David L. Paulsen, “Reply to Kim Paffenroth’s Comment,” *Harvard Theological Review* 86, no. 2 (1993): 235–39; and David L. Paulsen, “Must God Be Incorporeal?” *Faith and Philosophy* 6 (January 1989): 76–87.

<sup>23</sup>Given that humans are created in God’s image (and not the other way around), some LDS thinkers have suggested that it would be more accurate to say that humans are theomorphic—Godlike in form.

<sup>24</sup>Again, perhaps it would be better to say that humans have Godlike powers of knowing, willing, feeling, judging, loving, and so on.

<sup>25</sup>It is doubtful that the doctrine of anthropomorphism fell out of favor so quickly after the death of the apostles. As late as the end of the fourth century, enough monks in Egypt still believed in a corporeal god that when Theophilus, bishop of Alexandria, endorsed the concept of an incorporeal God there was such a stir that Theophilus recanted. See references in note 22 above.

<sup>26</sup>For a careful analysis of how mainline Christians have understood the doctrine of divine eternity, see Nelson Pike, *God and Timelessness* (New York: Schocken Books, 1970).

<sup>27</sup>A number of important twentieth-century thinkers prefer Roberts’s understanding of divine eternity as everlastingness. See, for example, Nicholas Wolterstorff’s “God Everlasting” in Steven M. Cahn and David Shatz, eds., *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 77–98, and the

tradition known as process theology, which was based upon the thought of Alfred Lord Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. The traditional view, of course, also has its contemporary defenders, recently the most notable being Norman Kretzman and Eleonore Stump.

<sup>28</sup>Roberts's claim that God is not immutable was nothing new. Many Latter-day Saints both explicitly and implicitly advanced this same doctrine. For explicit references to God's change or progress, see the following: Talmage, *Articles of Faith*, 390 (in other editions, see "The Comprehensiveness of Our Faith," chapter 24), 474 (in other editions, see appendix 24, note 4); John A. Widstoe, *A Rational Theology* (Salt Lake City: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1915), 24-26; Wilford Woodruff in *Journal of Discourses* 6:120; and Widstoe, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 20, 22. Among those whose writing implies that God is changing are Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 1:349; and John Taylor, *Journal of Discourses* 1:159, 8:5.

<sup>29</sup>On this point, Roberts refers to a similar suggestion made by Sir Oliver Lodge.

<sup>30</sup>That is, based on the nature of what is.

<sup>31</sup>Based on the semantics and syntax of our language.

<sup>32</sup>Roberts's belief about God's power being subject to eternal existences is similar to sentiments expressed by others. See Lorenzo Snow, *Conference Report*, April 1901, 2 (speaking of exalted beings in general); Widstoe, *A Rational Theology*, 24 (mentioning the attainment of godhood by obedience to laws); and Wilford Woodruff in *Journal of Discourses* 6:120 (stating that "God himself is increasing and progressing in knowledge, power, and dominion"). Orson Pratt authored at least two essays which advanced the contrary thesis that there was a terminus of progress. Both the First Presidency and the Quorum of the Twelve wrote messages which denounced these essays because of their content. James R. Clark, ed., *Messages of the First Presidency*, 6 vols. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1965), 2:214-23, 229-40.

The belief that there are any limitations to the attributes of God is seldom expressed by more recent Church authorities. Indeed, some have considered the supposition of a god who progresses in power or knowledge to be a heresy. Bruce R. McConkie, "The Seven Deadly Heresies," *1980 Devotional Speeches of the Year* (Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 1981), 74-85 (teaching that God progresses by multiplying kingdoms); Bruce R. McConkie, *Conference Reports*, October 1980, 75; and Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation* 1:7-9 (declaring that God does not progress in knowledge but in bringing to pass the immortality and eternal life of his children).

<sup>33</sup>The committee of the Quorum of the Twelve that reviewed Roberts's manuscript lodged a protest against his conjecture that God may increase endlessly in knowledge (418). They wrote:

Progression of God in knowledge. This thought is not accepted by members of the committee. We do not feel that it is wise to express a thought limiting God in this manner, which will cause needless controversy. While we believe in eternal progression and that God is progressing, it is not in quest of hidden truth or laws yet undiscovered to Deity. We prefer to believe with Nephi: "O how great the holiness of our God! For he knoweth all things, and there is not anything save he knows it." (2 Ne. 9:20).