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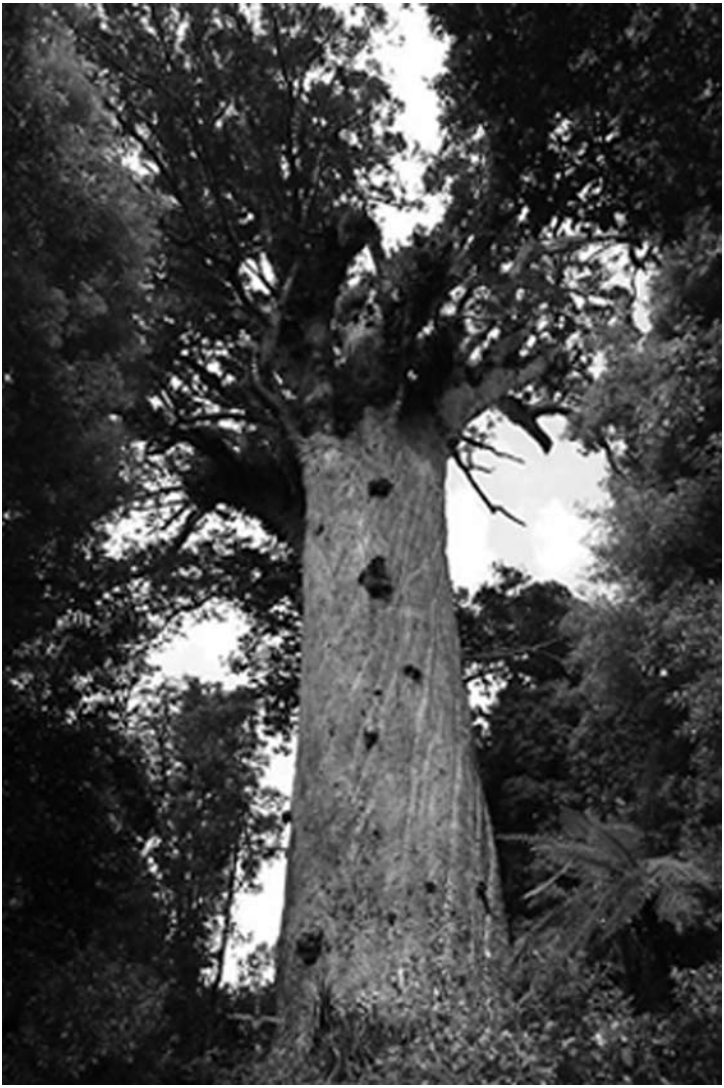
Abstract The author reflects on the lasting influence of the eminent Latter-day Saint scholar Hugh Nibley, whose far-reaching scholarship, unmatched erudition, and vigorous defense of the Mormon faith established Mormon studies on a solid foundation and pointed the way for others to follow.



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A Mighty Kauri[1] Has Fallen: Hugh Winder Nibley (1910–2005)

Louis Midgley

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I have been asked by my fellow editors to write something honoring Hugh Nibley. It is a pleasure to do so. Even though what I offer is a personal remembrance, I hope that what I have to say will in some measure speak both for and to others whose lives have been influenced by him. Obviously, others have their own stories of how and why they came to know (or know of) Nibley and thus how they were influenced by his example and scholarship. Even though they may never have known him directly, many came to appreciate him through what he wrote, the talks he gave, or the classes he taught. It may be that some who did not know him personally will discover that, without even being aware of what was happening, they were influenced by him. I have discovered that each person who knew him, even through his talks or writings, found or fashioned a different *persona*—one often suited to his or her own biases, needs, and longings.

My reflections will be intensely personal. I do not, however, want what I write to be platitudinous and generic such as might end up in a letter of recommendation for a student one hardly remembers. And I

1. The kauri tree (*Agathis australis*) was once common in New Zealand forests (in the Northland, Coromandel, and Auckland) until European greed removed all but four percent of them. The Maori even give the ancient ones names and mourn when one of those giants falls. The largest one ever measured was estimated, after it succumbed to a fire, to have lived for thousands of years and to have been, in sheer bulk, the largest tree in the world.

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will also strive to avoid, as Hugh would perhaps say, borrowing some syrupy lines from the writer's dreary "Handbook of Sentiments and Clichés."

In 1949 some political scientists at the University of Utah invited Hugh to read a paper on ancient statecraft. That essay could also be described as an account of the political dynamics of ancient nomadic and sedentary peoples and their related "religious" symbols, rituals, and ideology.[2] When his address was announced, I was intrigued. I was, as I will explain, looking for light. Here was someone I had never previously encountered—someone housed at Brigham Young University in religious education but apparently working in ancient history—who would be lecturing Gentiles (as well as Latter-day Saints) on ancient politics and religion. From that moment on he had a profound and lasting impact on me.

On that occasion there opened for me two new and exciting worlds. One of these involved nomadic hunters in antiquity who were intent on conquering sedentary farmers and thereby setting up sometimes vast empires. The other world that came into view that evening was much less remote and for me more lasting. That first encounter with Hugh Nibley changed my life. On that fateful evening I was delighted to discover an obviously bright, impish, loyal Latter-day Saint with something new and interesting to say. He was also not a bit shy about his faith, which was not the case with most others back then. Instead, he stood his ground, and I have always tried to follow his example. In addition, it was a delight to witness Hugh's relaxed, witty repartee with the learned. I discovered later that he enjoyed and perhaps even preferred conversations with skeptics and doubters, especially if they had thought

2. Hugh Nibley, "The Arrow, the Hunter, and the State," *Western Political Quarterly* 2/3 (1949): 328–44. This remarkable essay was soon followed by two others entitled "The Hierocentric State," *Western Political Quarterly* 4/2 (1951): 226–53; and "The Unsolved Loyalty Problem: Our Western Heritage," *Western Political Quarterly* 6/4 (1953): 631–57. Eventually another essay, entitled "Tenting, Toll, and Taxing," *Western Political Quarterly* 19/4 (1966): 599–630, took up the same complex of ideas. These essays have been republished in *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 1–147, 195–242.

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seriously about what he later called the "terrible questions"[3] or if they knew or cared about the past and were interested in a discussion consisting of more than mere sentiments and slogan-thinking.

It would not be an understatement to say that I was deeply impressed with his intelligence and the depth of his learning,[4] as well as by the fact that he made no effort to disguise his faith. He could play the academic game as well as or even better than the most skeptical critic along the Wasatch Front. Though he was not a stereotypical Saint, at that moment he became for me a role model.

Now, over five decades later, it may be difficult to appreciate the profound impact Hugh had on young Latter-day Saints and even on some older ones.[5] Most of those entering the university in those days were among the first, or even the first, to do so in their families. With little or no experience with universities, parents tended to fear that their children would be charmed into shedding their faith. These fears were not without foundation. Along the Wasatch Front, each university had its array of those eager to disabuse young Latter-day Saints of their parochial Mormon past, as well as their presumably crude, primitive faith. This was in addition to the dominant culture of unbelief then found in universities. Hugh was able in various ways to point a whole generation of young Latter-day Saints in a different direction—one that stressed both learning and fidelity to God.

Hugh was certainly an eccentric with his own sometimes colorful idiosyncrasies. There was his hat. It was clearly part of his costume. It was visible in 1949 at that lecture on ancient statecraft. With it, and

3. Hugh Nibley, "The Terrible Questions," in *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1992), 336–78.

4. Years later I was invited to write something for Latter-day Saints celebrating Nibley's remarkable lust for learning. See Louis Midgley, "Hugh Nibley: Portrait of a Leader," *Improvement Era,* May 1970, 79–81. I suspect that someone had seen my essay entitled "The Secular Relevance of the Gospel," *Dialogue* 4/4 (1969): 76–85, in which I tried to describe something of his role in the intellectual life of the Saints.

5. My father "borrowed" from me Hugh's books and essays. He would then write his name in them and refuse to return them. He claimed that he needed them. I would, he also explained, get them back when he passed on. This explains the duplicate copies I have of many of Hugh's books and essays.

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with his Deseret Industries duds, he signaled not only a disinterest in the ways of this world, but a distaste for its fads and fashions.[6]

It was only after my initial encounter with Hugh's "secular" scholarship that I started paying attention to his earlier efforts to explicate and defend the faith of the Saints. I soon tracked down the series of essays he had published on "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times,"[7] and then I located his first essay on the Book of Mormon.[8] My passion for and enthrallment with his scholarship on the Book of Mormon, as well as my own fondness for that book, thus began before and continued through my first mission to New Zealand (1950–52). As a missionary I was busy trying to introduce the Maori Saints to his scholarship. When I returned some fifty years later, there were still Saints in New Zealand who could remember my spouting about both the Book of Mormon and Nibley. This fact did not at all displease me.

From the moment in 1949 when I heard Hugh read that paper, I began collecting his essays. I am confident that others did this as well. I was conscientious, even compulsive. The result of my efforts over the years was the annotated "Bibliography and Register" published as a preface in the first volume of the Festschrift for Nibley.[9] My list served as the bibliographical foundation for subsequent volumes in the Collected Works of Hugh Nibley. It pleases me to have had this tiny role in that enormous and still unfinished project.

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6. At least back then it was not clear why he followed a different drummer, only that he did. For some of the details, see Boyd Petersen's remarkable biography entitled *Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life* (Salt Lake City: Kofford Books, 2002).

7. This series of essays can be found in the *Improvement Era,* December 1948–April 1949; reprinted in *Mormonism and Early Christianity* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987), 100–167.

8. Hugh Nibley, "The Book of Mormon as a Mirror of the East," *Improvement Era,* April 1948, 202–4, 249–51; this was essentially included in *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), 25–42.

9. See Louis Midgley, "Hugh Winder Nibley: Bibliography and Register," in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley,* ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 1:xv–lxxxvii. I began with "Hugh Nibley: A Short Bibliographical Note," *Dialogue* 2/1 (1967): 119–21, and then followed with a "Bibliography" in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless* (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 1978), 307–23; a fairly current bibliography is available on the Web at farms.byu.edu/publications/nibleybibliography.php (accessed 10 October 2005).

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I have discovered that for those in thrall to his writings, there are quite distinct Nibleys. Some, like me, have been drawn to his defense of the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon, or to his speculation about institutions and practices in antiquity. Others have seen something liberating in his scathing social criticism, in his fondness for the natural environment, or in his trenchant criticism of the rationalizations we tend to provide for worldly ambitions and endeavors. Still others have been attracted to his anti-war sentiments.

If one is inclined to employ the mushy, imprecise language of journalists who are busy oversimplifying things, then these apparent anomalies can be reduced to a vulgar slogan. In this instance, almost against my better judgment, I yield to the temptation. Much like Reinhold Niebuhr (the famous American Protestant theologian and social critic, 1892–1971), Nibley turned to the "right"—became a religious "conservative"—by passionately adopting and defending a Latter-day Saint "orthodoxy" (or neoorthodoxy), including the Book of Mormon and hence Joseph Smith's prophetic charisms, in contrast to a "liberal" cultural Mormonism prevalent after World War II among some nominally Latter-day Saint "intellectuals." But, again somewhat like Niebuhr, Nibley also turned to the "left" and hence was "liberal" in his various political and social concerns. This fact was not always clear to either his friends or critics. When Hugh's political opinions became clear, it was disconcerting to some of his admirers, just as his persistent, passionate defense of the faith was troublesome to dissident and cultural Mormons, some of whom were inclined to agree with his social criticism.

One especially delightful yet disconcerting aspect of Hugh's career flowed from his genuine passion for understanding an enormous range of questions about the past, present, and future. He had a great breadth of knowledge that rested on his remarkable mastery of a host of ancient and modern languages. This led some to claim that he was a mere dilettante since he did not focus on any one people or topic or time period, nor was he enslaved by some narrow scholarly school. Other than a capacity born of his considerable erudition that made it possible for him to attempt comparisons over time and between cultures, he was not at

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all beholden to any one narrow scholarly methodology. Unlike many other high-powered academics who are often locked into their narrow specialties, beholden to a currently popular academic method of dealing with issues, or who speak for some school of thought, one could never quite anticipate what new question, topic, approach, or literature Hugh would find interesting and consequently worthy of his efforts.

There were some exceptions, a few of which are worth mentioning. Hugh quite properly always detested theology, much to my delight and to the consternation of a few of his readers. This can be seen in various essays—for example, in the series of radio addresses he gave on the regular Sunday evening program of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at 9:00 PM, broadcast by KSL between 7 March and 17 October 1954. That series was entitled *Time Vindicates the Prophets*, and it initially circulated as thirty-one separate pamphlets. The material was again published as *The World and the Prophets,* one of Hugh's most popular and significant books.[10] In those talks, in addition to discounting what theologians have fashioned, Nibley sought to identify the predicament that some of them found themselves in with the heavens effectively shut.[11] In addition, he also made an effort to sort out the troublesome relationship between pagan philosophy and Christian faith.[12] He did not, however, see philosophy as the source of the apostasy but merely as an element in what turns up when something has already gone drastically wrong.

Hugh's disdain for *theology*—what might be called *classical theism* or the traditional so-called Christian *worldview,* elements of which, he believed, were borrowed from pagan philosophy—did not make of him an enemy of rational discourse. He did not abjure intellectual effort, wide and deep learning, or genuine academic accomplishment, as even

10. For the most recent edition, see *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1987).

11. See Hugh Nibley, "How Will It Be When None More Saith 'I Saw'?" in *The World and the Prophets,* 1–8, and elsewhere in those essays. In "St. Augustine and the Great Tradition" (*The World and the Prophets,* 80–88), Hugh describes the importance of the bishop of Hippo for both Roman Catholic and Protestant theology and also how and why he went wrong. But he also describes him as a "great and good man" doing as well as he could by living on tradition and without divine revelation.

12. See *The World and the Prophets,* 33–43, 53–62, 71–116, 249–51.

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a glance at the form or the contents of his writing should indicate. He did, however, have harsh things to say about sloppy sentimentality or silly slogan-thinking. He loathed sophistry. He also detested rhetoric, which he understood as the despicable art of selling what amounts to sentimental sweets to the sick (for a stipend, of course) when what they really need is a dose of real medicine—a turn or return to God and hence also a turn away from the fads and fashions of this world.

Though he was much more conversant with historians and literary figures, including poets, Hugh occasionally consulted writings of or about ancient philosophers. He drew upon this literature when he found it useful. He certainly did so in three lectures he gave in May 1963 at Yale University.[13] In these essays, as well as elsewhere, he described the old and still unresolved conflict between radically different efforts to understand the world: one longing for and perhaps willing to accept divine revelation and another that depends exclusively on unaided human reason. He also identified a third mode, which he described as a "sophistic junkyard," which garbles, muddles, and corrupts both the prophetic (*mantic*) and the philosophic (*sophic*) ways of understanding the human situation. He was, I believe, unable to figure out where some philosophers fit into his own schema.[14] The way he set out the opposition between what others have called the wisdom of Jerusalem and the wisdom of Athens is still remarkably insightful.

When I encountered Hugh, much of what went on in the university seemed to me stale and boring—mere textbook stuff. And yet it still ground away at the faith of young Saints. Why? Then, as now, disciplined conformity rather than intellectual independence was the norm. Genuine learning, while celebrated, was still downplayed and replaced by the received ideologies of the day. In addition, our teachers, if they

13. These lectures carried the general title "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic" and were eventually published in *The Ancient State,* 311–79. For a similar and related essay, written at about the same time, see "Paths That Stray: Some Notes on Sophic and Mantic," in *The Ancient State,* 380–478.

14. For a description of Nibley's account of what others have tended to see as a struggle between faith and reason and also for comments on what I consider his failure to sort the philosophers correctly into his own insightful categories, see Louis Midgley, "Directions That Diverge: 'Jerusalem and Athens' Revisited," *FARMS Review of Books* 11/1 (1999): 27–87.

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were nominally LDS, tended to be part of what has come to be known as the "Lost Generation"—that is, those first ones who ventured out into the glamorous world of universities and then came back with degrees but without much, if any, faith, or with a studied skepticism about divine things. This was especially true of those who went into the humanities or social sciences. Some may have taken skepticism with them, but others clearly had their faith frayed by the profoundly secular instruction they received. Some saw this indoctrination as a liberation from the confining faith of a parochial community but those who took this route did not seem to notice that they had merely moved from one religion to another. They neglected to see that their teachers were really preachers of a fashionable new "faith" from which God was excluded.

Twenty years after the end of World War II, Richard Bushman, commenting on what was still taking place, asked why "we have lost so many of our young people in eastern schools, or at the University of Utah for that matter." His answer was that "they are overpowered by a secular culture that dazzles them with its splendors and seemingly puts Mormon parochialism in the shade."[15] In addition, it must be remembered that even after World War II, the University of Utah was the center—to the degree that there was such a thing—of what might be called Mormon intellectual life. BYU had not yet emerged from obscurity. When I entered the university in 1948, there was little or no nondevotional, intellectually challenging Latter-day Saint literature.[16] There was then essentially no genuinely professional Latter-day Saint history other than a few items like some rather pedantic Utah history

15. Richard L. Bushman, letter, *Dialogue* 1/1 (1966): 12.

16. I was like someone in the heat of the desert in need of cool living water who found only warm brackish stuff. For basic information, I read John Henry Evans, *Joseph Smith, An American Prophet* (New York: Macmillan, 1940), and some later edition, probably 1930, of Joseph Fielding Smith's *Essentials in Church History* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1922), as well as several items by B. H. Roberts, who provided some polemical fireworks. I longed to see the restoration of the gospel considered in a larger framework. I discovered a few titles, including Lowell L. Bennion's *The Religion of the Latter-day Saints* (Salt Lake City: LDS Department of Education, 1940). I was, however, disappointed in much of this literature.

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texts.[17] I found this disconcerting. There was virtually no literature that gave even a hint that the faith of the Saints was intellectually viable. I needed or desired, as did other Latter-day Saints, some literature that at least offered a faint assurance that my faith could withstand the best that the culture of unbelief dominating universities at that time could offer.

The Mormon History Association was launched nearly two decades after I entered the university. For me the promise of a competent, professional history of the Mormon past was attractive, even though I did not plan on contributing to it. I also very much liked the idea behind the founding of *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought*. Later I had to admit that both were mixed bags. From 1966 to the present an internal struggle has taken place in both venues. There are, I grant, those who strive to tell the story of the Mormon past from within the categories of faith, but there are also those in thrall in one way or another to the corrosive secularizing influences that are more or less borrowed from or dependent upon the culture of unbelief that still dominates academic circles, the media, and popular culture.

I witnessed an early version of this struggle that took place at the University of Utah after 1952. And in various ways it involved Hugh Nibley. Coming immediately after my first mission to New Zealand (1950–52), this intellectual struggle was for me tantalizing, provocative, and challenging. I listened and observed. I sensed that it was wise to keep one's opinions to oneself, which I more or less did. Unlike some who blasted away at the parochial Saints and loved to berate the Brethren, the best of the lot, Sterling McMurrin (1914–1996), then teaching in philosophy but later in history, manifested a measure of moderation and was a model of civility. I eventually came to see that his neat and orderly sorting of ideas and isms, while formidable on the surface and helpful for a preliminary understanding, also obscured the vast richness and complexity hidden away in the enormous literature of historical,

17. For some basic information, I read Leland H. Creer's *The Founding of an Empire: The Exploration and Colonization of Utah, 1776–1856* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1947), and Andrew L. Neff's *History of Utah, 1847–1869*, ed. Leland H. Creer (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1940).

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theological, and philosophical speculation. His mode of doing intellectual history also tended to obscure the fact that it was itself part of and situated within a conversation in which the current dominant biases were inexorably being ground down and replaced. I also discovered that there is much more going on in both current and past conversations that is not accessible with labels, brand names, or appeals to one's own superior rationality.

While I was working on a master's degree, Hugh brought to my attention Rudolf Bultmann (1892–1976), a German New Testament scholar who was attempting to demythologize what he considered the primitive mythology he found in the New Testament.[18] I proposed to McMurrin that I examine everything I could find by (and about) Bultmann and that we meet each week to discuss what I had discovered. Though he was unfamiliar with Bultmann, McMurrin accepted my proposal. My encounter with Bultmann was enlightening[19] and eventually led me to the writings of Martin Heidegger (1889–1971) since Bultmann seems to have fallen under his spell. When I mentioned this to McMurrin, he labeled Bultmann a theistic existentialist and placed him in the same category as Paul Tillich (1886–1965), a then influential German-American Protestant theologian.

Reading Bultmann also led me to the literature on the interpretation of texts—that is, to what is often called hermeneutics. I came to see that the way we tell stories about the past depends upon on how we read texts. I discovered that how we read (and hence understand or explain the meaning of what we find in texts), what we select in the texts we consult or for which we search, and also what we will allow within what we consider the realm of reality depend upon the assumptions and the interpretation we bring to that task or somehow even-

18. Nibley, "The Way of the Church," *Improvement Era,* January–December 1955; reprinted in *Mormonism and Early Christianity,* 209–322.

19. I read Rudolf Bultmann's *The Presence of Eternity: History and Eschatology* (New York: Harpers, 1957); *Primitive Christianity and Its Contemporary Setting,* trans. R. H. Fuller (New York: Meridian Books, 1956); *Theology of the New Testament,* trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1952 and 1955); and also his *Essays Philosophical and Theological*, trans. J. C. G. Greig (London: SCM, 1955); *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Scribner, 1958); and any the secondary literature I could locate, all of which was new to both me and McMurrin.

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tually adopt. The historian provides the plot, and so the story always necessarily has a political motivation and setting. I also began to see that the categories and distinctions we frequently take for granted have their own often convoluted history. From that point on, all talk of balanced, neutral, detached, disinterested, objective historians and their vaunted histories became for me problematic.

I could see that the intellectual history with which I was being indoctrinated was itself dependent upon assumptions that were often poorly grounded, if not entirely groundless, or at least unexamined. I began to see that my teachers' background assumptions and beliefs also had their own precarious history. I was then able to see how and why bright, articulate people could understand and explain the same things differently, read texts differently, and hence also fashion quite different stories; they did so on the basis of different and conflicting categories and assumptions or beliefs, part of which they bring to the task at hand. It became clear to me that the historian provides the plot and selects what will count as evidence.

Subsequently, I could begin to sort out exactly what divided Nibley from McMurrin. One who begins with the secular credo that angels cannot possibly make books available to human beings, since there are no angels, will have no reason even to read the Book of Mormon. With an agnostic dogma in place, nothing will ever be allowed to count in favor of the Book of Mormon. It became obvious why one so disposed would insist that efforts to stress the importance of the Book of Mormon were signs of an irrational "departure from the authentic spirit of Mormon religion." I came to see Nibley's way of doing intellectual history as superior to McMurrin's neat sorting of ideas and writers, which seemed formidable on the surface and was helpful for a preliminary understanding but which obscured the enormous complexity, ambiguity, and richness hidden in a vast literature. In addition, I was troubled by the fact that the use of ontological categories seemed to compromise needlessly the links between the content and ground of faith and historical matters.

In 1953, after having studied under Tillich for a year at Union Theological Seminary, McMurrin assigned his students a book by Tillich

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that was larded with talk about Being-Itself—that is, the God of classical theism.[20] In that book Tillich flatly denied that God can properly be said to exist. He talked, instead, of a God somehow beyond the God of traditional Christian theology. For Tillich, God simply could not exist since only finite things exist, and he conceived of God as the unconditional, infinite, absolute ground or power of being in everything that exists. Finite existing things, in Tillich's system, are thus real only to the extent that they participate in their essence or nature. Existing things are merely actual—that is, only to some degree real. They are real to the extent that they stand out of Non-Being by participating in Being-Itself, which he thought constituted the power or ground of being in everything that exists but which is not another existing thing alongside other things. Tillich insisted that this is where sophisticated theology has been heading since Christians started drawing upon pagan categories and explanations. All of this seemed to me to give priority to categories borrowed from pagan sources, none of which are found in the Bible.

In 1963, while I was working at Brown University on my dissertation on Paul Tillich, Hugh delivered those three lectures at Yale. I was confident that I had collected everything Tillich had published.[21] But I was wrong; Hugh had discovered something written by Tillich that I had missed. And he made some polemical use of what he had found. Nibley wrote:

> Protestants and Catholics alike would now have us believe that the old prophetic tradition was never completely lost. But Professor Tillich knows better: "This discourse," he writes at the introduction to a recent study, "is based on the proposition that the prophetic tradition of the Church was lost. It is one of the great tragedies in the History of the Christian Church, that this tradition actually and virtually completely perished. . . . For St. Augustine the millennium is here, everything essential has been achieved . . . in the hierarchy of the

20. See Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

21. I had access to the library resources at Brown and the libraries at Harvard, as well as some access to Tillich's unpublished manuscripts.

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> Church. With this theory the spirit of Prophecy was expelled from the official Church."[22]

I was surprised that Tillich had called this development a tragedy since he was bent on taking it to its logical conclusion. The historical ground and content of faith is radically compromised when the prophetic gift is suppressed and theology takes the place of divine revelations. When one reduces God to Being-Itself—the ground or power of being—what becomes of crucial matters like the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth? Or of Stephen's or Joseph Smith's theophanies? What happens to the account of the recovery of the Book of Mormon or the theophanies described in it, or to the core of its prophetic message? Speculation about divine things moves away from the historical, the mundane, the concrete. My encounters with Nibley, then McMurrin, and eventually with Tillich taught me that it is a grand mistake to turn the Christian story into theology bounded by ontological categories. My own efforts to defend the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and hence also Joseph Smith's prophetic truth claims flow directly from these early insights.

McMurrin was fond of Paul Tillich and contemptuous of Hugh Nibley, C. S. Lewis (1898–1963), and Karl Barth (1886–1968),[23] all of whom he dismissed as spouting sheer irrationalism. Why? Lewis clearly saw the necessity of Christian faith having historical contents and grounding. This is at least part of what has made him attractive to Latter-day Saints. Nibley's treatment of the Book of Mormon, while not aimed at proving it true (something he thought both unnecessary and impossible),[24] began by accepting it for what it claims to be. And, in his own way, something like this was also true for Barth.

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22. Nibley, "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic," 357–58. Nibley was quoting Paul Tillich, "Die Wiederentdeckung der prophetischen Tradition in der Reformation," *Neue Zeitschrift für systematishe Theologie* 3 (1961): 237. I worked on Tillich day and night for a full year and yet Hugh could waltz into New Haven and quote something from Tillich I had never seen.

23. We read C. S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1942), which he mocked. He did not assign anything by Karl Barth.

24. See, for example, *Since Cumorah,* 2nd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1988), xiv.

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In his famous criticism of religion, which parallels and perhaps surpasses what can be found in the writings of Karl Marx, Barth argued that in religion human beings did the talking. In divine revelation—though not necessarily in the scriptures but always when guided by the Holy Spirit—it was God doing the talking, not just in previous times but even now. Barth thus distinguished religion, which is a human manufacture, from divine revelation and the Word of God, which is not to be confused with or reduced to the Bible. Unlike at least some conservative Christians, Barth was not advancing a bibliolatry. McMurrin saw all this as irrational, not because it avoided bibliolatry, but because it did not focus on the words of human beings about divine and human things—that is, on theology—but rather on the Word of God, a witness of which is available here and now through the Holy Spirit.[25]

Where Bultmann insisted that the Bible was larded with, among other things, quaint legends and bizarre myths, which he insisted must now be demythologized and thereby transformed into a message of some significance to German skeptics, Karl Barth was simply appalled by such audacity. Barth argued that

> we need to take with literal seriousness the message of the bodily resurrected Jesus Christ if we are to find ourselves in a new life, in a new world. If Rudolf Bultmann were surrounded by a church which in its preaching and order, in its politics and relation to state and society, in its whole way of dealing with modern problems, were to put into practice even a little of its belief in the Risen Lord, then not only would it be practically immune against the heresies of the Bultmannian conclusions and theses but it would also have in reply to Bultmann the one argument which could perhaps cause him to abandon his basic position, *with its tying of the gospel to a pagan ontology*, and make him a free expositor of the NT freely speaking for itself.[26]

25. Barth was therefore not what might be called a fundamentalist.

26. *Karl Barth–Rudolf Bultmann: Letters, 1922–1966*, ed. Bernd Jaspert, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1981), 146, emphasis added.

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I have always been concerned to show the links between the faith of the Saints and events in the past, and hence to defend both the prophetic message and gift, as well as the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon. In this I have followed Nibley and not McMurrin. When I first arrived at BYU, I doubted that any Latter-day Saint would be tempted to attempt to sever the link between faith and history by tying "the gospel to a pagan ontology," to use Karl Barth's pithy formulation. I was naive. I had no idea what would eventually be promulgated by Signature Books, preached at Sunstone symposia, and published in *Dialogue*.

At least until the 1980s Hugh was the one who stood in the way of such radically revisionist accounts of the Mormon past, even though he was not directly involved in writing accounts of the restoration. He concerned himself from time to time with a few troublesome complaints. Where the Latter-day Saints involved in the fledgling profession of Mormon history were anxious to secure a place in the history of the American West for the Latter-day Saints, Hugh's essays always stood as a witness to the truth of the restoration (and in that sense he was a martyr) and also made him a defender of the faith (or apologist).

He always avoided the Mormon History Association. He was not a joiner but a loner. His understanding of the faith of the Saints went far beyond the narrow confines of our pioneer past and the story of the Great Basin. He clearly did not fit neatly within the new profession of Mormon history. Though he had a high regard for learning and serious scholarship, he refused to play the games academics typically play. He was contemptuous of titles, rank, reputation—all worldly adornments hardly worthy of a Saint. He avoided scholarly meetings where the bulk of what takes place is socializing and networking. Instead, he gave hundreds of talks to groups of ordinary Latter-day Saints, without ever talking down to his audience. He was not a snob. Some may have thought it was not appropriate for him to publish in the old *Improvement Era* or the *Ensign* or to have given talks on the radio or in stake centers. However, he saw these as opportunities for setting out some challenging ideas for the Saints and for opening a window on worlds they may not have encountered. Giving a talk was his way of having a conversation.

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When someone with a scholarly reputation visited BYU, Hugh sought him out and engaged him in conversation. I witnessed a number of these remarkable exchanges, one of which involved David Riesman (1909–2002), the Harvard professor whose book *The Lonely Crowd* was by far the most-read essay in sociology at the time. Riesman told me that Hugh had to be for Mormonism the equivalent of St. Augustine for Latin Christianity. Then there were conversations I witnessed with William Barrett (1915–1992), whose book entitled *Irrational Man: A Study in Existentialist Philosophy* was then very popular, and Jacob Neusner (1932–), the most widely published Jewish scholar. He was not interested in conversations with Protestant preachers over the question of faith and works or with American historians bent on seeing Joseph Smith in the most narrow possible light.

Since Hugh was an inveterate reviser of manuscripts, he needed a deadline. The necessity of having a manuscript ready for thirty consecutive weeks to be read on the radio within the prescribed time limits eventually yielded *The World and the Prophets*, one of his most impressive books. And the requirement that he produce a manuscript ready to be published each month, when he was generating those series that appeared in the *Improvement Era*, forced him to control his otherwise powerful urge to revise, refine, adjust, embellish, or extend. Without a deadline or a very demanding editor of an academic journal, he had difficulty finishing a project.

Without Hugh's far-reaching scholarship, there would be no Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies and therefore also no defense of the faith and the Saints. It was his work with which others could begin FARMS, and it was because of his profound and lasting influence on hundreds of scholars that this *Review* has been possible.[27]

I have had the experience of thinking that I had found a new way of looking at some passage in the Book of Mormon, only to find that

27. Neither Terryl L. Givens, *By the Hand of Mormon: The American Scripture That Launched a New World Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), nor Noel B. Reynolds, ed., *Book of Mormon Authorship Revisited: The Evidence for Ancient Origins* (Provo, UT: FARMS, 1997), nor a host of other similar and related works, would have been possible without the earlier efforts of Nibley.

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what I thought I had discovered had already been almost casually mentioned by Hugh in something written long before. Others have had exactly that experience in their own scholarly endeavors. Hugh was not stuck on what he had previously written or said. If one could demonstrate—really show and not merely assert—a flaw in something he had written, he would be grateful. This is a virtue not many academics have. He was, in fact, pleased to see others correcting and fleshing out his own work.

Some have complained about all those footnotes. There were, they moan, far too many. Or they propagate the myth that his citations were phony. This nonsense has apparently come from someone who found a flaw in some citations. But this is not likely to be the case with those essays published by FARMS in his Collected Works, where a sustained effort was made to check everything and, if necessary, to make needed corrections. I edited two of his essays.[28] I checked every quotation and citation. I spent hundreds of hours tracking down his citations and making them consistent and getting them into the proper format. With much searching and a bit of ingenuity, I was able to locate every item. Of course, at times he read things into some of the literature he cited, where others might have read that literature differently. But this is exactly the case with all intellectual history.

Early on in his career, when Fawn Brodie (1915–1981) published her attack on Joseph Smith, Nibley stepped forward to do a bit of counterpunching. What Brodie wrote could easily be dealt with today by professional Latter-day Saint historians who are now intimately familiar with the published and still unpublished materials on Joseph's life. But in 1946 there were no such historians. Hugh, whose interests and training were in ancient history, took on the task of buying some time while others got up to speed.[29] Then the Brethren requested that

28. See Hugh Nibley, "Beyond Politics," *BYU Studies* 9/1 (1974): 3–28, reprinted in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless,* 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 301–28; and "Treasures in the Heavens," *Dialogue* 8/3–4 (1973): 76–98, reprinted in *Old Testament and Related Studies* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1986), 171–214.

29. See Nibley, *No, Ma'am, That's Not History*, reprinted in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1991), 3–45.

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he deal with other anti-Mormon literature. I heard him complain of having to do this. He resented having to take time away from other interests to deal with it.[30] But there came a time after 1980 that Hugh no longer gave any attention to this dismal literature. He remained on the sidelines while Mark Hofmann was doing and generating mischief. He let others take over his previous role.

Though he went through, I believe, a period during which he wondered if his work would have a lasting impact on Latter-day Saint scholarship, he was much reassured by the outpouring of scholarship published by FARMS and especially by what he found in this *Review*. The last time I saw him, he complained that those at FARMS were treating him as if he had already passed away. The reason he gave was that he had not been sent a copy of the most recent number of the *Review*. At that very moment the doorbell rang, and the postman delivered his copy. Hugh was delighted. And his wife, Phyllis, then had the task of reading over four hundred pages aloud to him, something which she had become accustomed to doing during his declining years.

I am constantly reminded that, like so many others, I owe much to Hugh Nibley. When he heard that Hugh had passed away, a friend from New Zealand wrote to me and described Hugh's insights, appropriately I believe, as "veil parting." Hugh, he said, put his many gifts—his academic abilities—"to noble use—to give light to spiritual issues so that those that were comparatively blind could see a little further." We can all be grateful for his valiant service in this regard. Whatever his quirks, his service to the kingdom was immense. Now for a bit of nostalgia—will we, I sometimes wonder, ever again have something like *Time Vindicates the Prophets* read over KSL? Or will we ever see a priesthood manual like *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*? As my Maori friends might say, a giant kauri has now fallen; the nurture it once offered for God's creatures in the human "forest" has been significantly reduced. But it is also true that when a giant kauri falls, its influence does not soon disappear. Its seeds still germinate and its many seedlings continue to grow. Thus it is and should be with Hugh Nibley.

30. See Nibley, *The Myth Makers* and *Sounding Brass*, both reprinted in *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass,* 105–727.