

## Hugh Nibley as Cassandra

*Since Cumorah*, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1988. xv; 407 pp. Illus., appendix, index. \$16.95.

*Approaching Zion*, vol. 9 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley*. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1989. xviii; 614 pp. Index. \$18.95.

“Warfare and the Book of Mormon.” In *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, edited by Stephen D. Ricks and William J. Hamblin, 127–45. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co. and Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies, 1990. x; 534 pp. Illus., indexes. \$19.95.

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Hugh Nibley is generally recognized as the finest scholarly defender of the Latter-day Saint faith of the late twentieth century. I hope that he will, before too long, be recognized for a much greater achievement: he is the finest lay (as opposed to officially called) prophet of the Latter-day Saint people. Apart from the Old Testament, Book of Mormon, and Latter-day Saint prophets he has learned from, he most perceptively describes our sins, most courageously and persistently calls us to repentance, and most accurately predicts our future if we will not repent.

But Nibley's prophetic gift has been much like that of Cassandra (the Trojan King Priam's daughter, who was blessed to be able to predict the future infallibly but cursed that no one would believe her). He has been uniquely insightful and yet essentially ineffective. His immense scholarship in support of the divinity of Joseph Smith's mission and the historical authenticity of the Book of Mormon and Pearl of Great Price, scholarship that he claims is not very important to him or worth much to God, has won him great renown at all levels of the Church. This semiofficial recognition ought to have made his voice even more effective than, say, that of Lowell Bennion, who is his only peer as a lay prophet. But Nibley's crucial message of repentance to our greedy, militaristic, and environmentally destructive society and his claim that fully living

the law of consecration, as we covenant to do, is our only hope are mainly ignored—perhaps simply unheard. On the other hand, Bennion's social criticism has gotten him severely criticized but has also been effective for change.

My new hope for some improvement in Nibley's strange and heartbreaking situation is based on the publication of *Approaching Zion*, which contains eighteen of his personal essays on education, politics, and society. In this book his central message is so clearly spelled out, so often repeated, and so well argued that readers will at last understand and, I trust, be convinced. In addition, the reissue of *Since Cumorah*, Nibley's great 1967 apologetic for the Book of Mormon, provides an opportunity for a new generation to see what most of the original readers seem to have missed: the last two chapters of the book—especially "Good People and Bad People," Nibley's first analysis of the "Nephite disease" (354) of greed and vengeance he claims modern Latter-day Saints have contracted—were greater achievements and more important to him than the apologetics in the preceding eleven chapters.

These two chapters are examples, though relatively minor ones, of Nibley's Cassandra-like blessing and his curse: tens of thousands cling to his every word about the scriptures but ignore his prophetic social commentary, which I believe is much more valuable and will outlast his apologetics. He has become his own best evidence for his claim that Latter-day Saints ignore or suppress prophetic statements that hit them where they live—in their prejudices or pocketbooks. He has so far had very little effect on the response of his readers to three major issues he has spoken much about, materialism, militarism, and pollution.

Nibley is master of a remarkably clear and readable prose, given that he indulges somewhat in densely textured scriptural quotation and paraphrase and learned allusions. He is widely read in classical and contemporary materials, but his social analysis is most heavily indebted to Joseph Smith, Brigham Young, the Old Testament and the Book of Mormon—sources he uses with proper respect for context of time and place. I find his arguments meticulously worked through, his central, repeated message frighteningly convincing, and his witty, fearless personal voice constantly satisfying, often exhilarating, even capable of an occasional moral and rhetorical tour de force:

What we read about in the Book of Mormon is the "Nephite Disease"—and we have it! We should be glad that we do not have the much worse diseases that infect some other societies, and that there is greater hope for us. But diabetes if neglected can kill one just as dead as cancer—after all, the Nephites were terminated. We can be



most grateful, therefore, regardless of how sick others may be, that God in the Book of Mormon has diagnosed our sickness for our special benefit, and prescribed a cure for us. It is into our hands that that Book of Mormon has been placed: after more than a century, many people still do not know of its existence. Plainly it is meant for us, as it reminds us many times; it is the story of what happened to the Nephites—and we are the Nephites: “It must needs be that the riches of the earth are mine to give; but beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old” (D&C 38:39). There it is in a nutshell: it is the fate of the Nephites, not of the Lamanites, Greeks, or Chinese, that concerns us; and that doom was brought on them by pride which in turn was engendered by the riches of the earth. (*Cumorah*, 354)

Nibley’s central message, which he amply demonstrates is the central burden of the scriptures and modern prophets, is that the main issue of mortality is economic (how God will “provide” the material needs of his children) and that there are only two, sharply divided, ways to resolve it—that of Zion (God’s) or that of Babylon (Satan’s).

God’s way essentially ignores worldly economics and striving for wealth; Satan’s way makes those things central. God gives his gifts for our mortal sustenance freely, assuring us that he provides “enough and to spare” (D&C 104:17) and that his way to make certain that all have enough is that “the poor shall be exalted, in that the rich are made low” (D&C 104:16). God asks us to recognize that he, not our own work or deserving, is the source of the gifts; that, in order to be saved, we share our gifts with whoever is poorer than ourselves until all are equal (“for if ye are not equal in earthly things ye cannot be equal in obtaining heavenly things” [D&C 78:6]); and that we share and become equal “not grudgingly” (D&C 70:14), cultivating charity as the highest virtue.

Satan teaches us that we live in a harsh world where we must work hard in striving for wealth (there is “no free lunch” and even education is to be measured only in increased income). What we thereby earn is our own to use however we wish, not to be shared freely (token tithing for “fire insurance” and occasional gifts to keep up appearances are OK) but to be amassed, consumed, and passed on to children. In Babylon the highest virtue is “justice,” which usually means mainly that you can do whatever it takes to get what you “deserve” and you must take vengeance on others for any “offenses.” In fact, Satan frankly warns he will use riches to seduce religious and military leaders. And with these riches they will reign with violence and terror until Christ comes.

Nibley claims that Latter-day Saints have essentially chosen Babylon. We still want to have it both ways and so continue to pay pious homage to Zion. We wrest the scriptures to avoid facing the absolute demand of God that we leave off our traffic with the world



and begin to approach Zion by living the law of consecration. Instead, we are eagerly satisfied with Satan's decoy, promoted by some Church leaders and professors and the very rich themselves, that if we are paying our tithes and offerings we are already living the covenant of consecration. Worst of all, we fawn over "The Brethren" but ignore our prophets when they call us to repentance for greed or pride:

If we ask what improvement has been made up to the present, there is no better standard to judge by than that given by President Spencer W. Kimball in a solemn and inspired message to the church on the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the nation ["The False Gods We Worship," *Ensign*, June 1976]. . . . First [he made] a general observation: "When I review the performance of this people in comparison with what is expected, I am appalled and frightened." . . . What is it that so frightens and appalls the prophet? Three things in particular: (1) *The abuse of environment*: . . . "I have the feeling that the good earth can hardly bear our presence upon it. . . ." (2) *The pursuit of personal affluence*: "When men have fallen under the power of Satan and lost the faith, they have put in its place a hope in the 'arm of flesh' and in 'gods of silver, and gold, of brass,' . . . that is, in idols." (3) *Trust in military security*: "[We are a war-like people]. . . . We commit vast resources to the fabrication of gods of stone and steel—ships, planes, missiles, fortifications—and depend on them for protection and deliverance. When threatened, we become anti-enemy instead of pro-kingdom of God. . . . What are we to fear when the Lord is with us? . . . We must leave off the worship of modern-day idols and a reliance on the 'arm of flesh,' for the Lord has said to all the world in our day, 'I will not spare any that remain in Babylon' [D&C 64:24]."

And how did the Saints, who never tire of saying, "The Prophet! The Prophet! We have a prophet!" receive his words? As might be expected, reaction has ranged from careful indifference to embarrassed silence and instant deep freeze. (*Zion*, 366–67)

It is in this editorial by President Kimball, which he refers to often, that Nibley apparently has found the most direct contemporary inspiration for his analysis of greed and its corollary evils, violence and pollution—and also the most disheartening evidence that any such message would be ignored by the Church.

Nibley claims (and documents well in *Approaching Zion*, his main essays written over the past twenty years) that, after some initial failures and successes, we have, since the death of Brigham Young, moved quite steadily away from obedience to the Lord's first commandment to this dispensation: "Seek not for riches but for wisdom" (D&C 6:7). He shows that this surrender to Babylon's voracious pursuit of wealth has brought two inevitable consequences: (1) a pious patriotism in support of and even direct



involvement in the military-industrial complex that fills the world with death and suffering in the name of “virtuous violence” (255) and (2) complicity in death-dealing industrial pollution of our once-pure mountain valleys, even welcoming, for the profits, chemical weapons and nuclear wastes into “Zion.” Nibley traces in essay after essay how we have not only ignored God’s first commandment to us, we have also ignored the connection between Christ’s warning to Joseph Smith (recorded in his first account of the First Vision, rediscovered in 1969), “Behold the world lieth in sin at this time,” and Christ’s explanation in the Doctrine and Covenants, “It is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, *wherefore the world lieth in sin*” (49:20; italics added; *Zion*, 21–2). We still build much of our lives on the delusion that it is a *virtue* to possess more than others and to keep it mainly for ourselves, not heeding Christ’s warning that we thus fully join sinful Babylon.

Nibley is perhaps most challenging in his answer to the paradoxes raised by the previous claims: how did a people initially committed to the law of consecration, the Prince of Peace, and God-given stewardship over the earth and its plants and animals end up so far afield? His answer is psychologically astute, outrageously unexpected, and I think dead right:

Attempts to compromise on the law of God put one, as Brigham Young said, in an intolerable situation, a state of perpetual tension; one becomes defensive and self-justifying, and to clear his conscience all the way one assumes an aggressive posture. The result is that Latter-day Saints are perhaps the most rigidly opposed to the principles of sharing of any people in the world. (*Zion*, 470)

He claims that in the three evils President Kimball expressly warned about—“outspoken contempt for the environment, unabashed reverence for wealth, and ardent advocacy of military expansion”—“it can be shown with cruel documentation that Utah leads the nation, at least through its representatives” (*Zion*, 367). In another essay, with the unusual but effective device of simply quoting (with occasional comments) headlines from newspapers over a couple of years (471–78), Nibley provides that “cruel documentation.” It is humiliating evidence that Utah, with its huge Latter-day Saint majority, is indeed by many relevant measures the worst state in the worst nation for uninhibited entrepreneurial greed and inequality, militarism, and disrespect for animal and plant life or even its own, originally God-inspired, architectural heritage and civic environments.

Nibley first came to this original and offensive insight—that Latter-day Saints are not only sinful in these important areas but the *most* sinful—over twenty years ago by studying the Nephites:



It would seem that church people are especially susceptible to the Nephite disease . . . : “The people of the church began to be lifted up in the pride of their eyes, and to set their hearts upon riches . . . and they began to persecute those that did not believe according to their own will and pleasure” (Alma 4:8). An aggressive and self-righteous bigotry was the best defense against uneasy consciences. (*Cumorah*, 358)

One of my friends in graduate school, very knowledgeable in American and Latter-day Saint history, once asked me, “How did the Mormons, who were in the nineteenth century the most radical challenge to America’s exploitive materialism and violent individualism, become, in the twentieth century, an extremely conservative people, quintessentially American in those values it once rejected.” I had no answer, but Nibley does: partly to survive under vicious attack, we accommodated to American values, which are those of Babylon, and, knowing better than other Americans the seriousness of our sin, we handled the intolerable tension with aggressive self-justification and defensive bigotry—even to the point of becoming “number one” in our sins!

What gives Nibley’s outrageous answer increased plausibility is his telling review of how we eagerly adopt traditional Christian capitalists’ scripture-wrenching and Satan’s time-tested decoys to aid our rationalizations. We quote as if it had scriptural force, “In the world but not of the world,” a palliative “invented by a third-century Sophist” (*Zion*, 164–65) for the same purpose that we use it: to justify trying to combine Babylon and Zion. We thus ignore its direct contradiction of the New Testament (1 John 2:16).

We often hear quoted in Church classes, as an excuse for unequal distribution of wealth, Christ’s statement, “The poor are always with us,” or its Old Testament source, “For the poor shall never cease out of the land” (Deut. 15:11). But we ignore the rest of the verse, which clarifies Christ’s meaning as well: “Therefore I command thee, saying thou shalt open up thy hand wide unto thy brother, to the poor.” Nibley comments, “[The poor’s] perpetual presence is not to make us indifferent, but it is a constant reminder that God has his eye on us” (*Zion*, 193).

Nibley shows how we even wrest our own modern scriptures:

The director of a Latter-day Saint Institute was recently astounded when [I] pointed out to him that the ancient teaching that the idler shall not eat the bread of the laborer has always meant that the idle rich shall not eat the bread of the laboring poor, as they always have. . . . He had always been taught that the idle *poor* should not eat the bread of the laboring *rich*, because it is perfectly obvious that a poor man has not worked as hard as a rich man. With the same lucid logic my Latter-day Saint students tell me that [the reason] there were



no poor in the Zion of Enoch [was] because only the well-to-do were admitted to the city. (*Zion*, 241)

Nibley's analysis of our use of "decoys" to avoid facing our own sins also seems to me psychologically astute. He points out that we Latter-day Saints fulminate so much against the sex and substance-abuse sins of others partly as a smokescreen to hide our own much more serious failure to live the law of consecration (168). We are among the world's most extreme anticommunists, partly to hide our own capitalistic sins. We cruelly condemn and punish blue-collar crime and juvenile delinquency and ignore or slap the wrists of the white-collar criminals in our midst, forgetting Brigham Young's insight: "The loose conduct, and calculations, and manner of doing business, which have characterized men who have had property in their hands, have laid the foundation to bring our boys into the spirit of stealing" (*Zion*, 56).

According to Nibley, Satan's favorite decoy is to spread the word that he is "a four-star horror with claws, horns, or other obvious trimmings," to get us to "put the whole blame [for the world's troubles] on sex" (*Zion*, 54) and then to come in person as "a very proper gentleman, a handsome and persuasive salesman," offering what Brigham Young recognized as the greatest danger to Latter-day Saints, "becoming rich and being hailed by outsiders as a first-class community" (55):

The worst sinners, according to Jesus, are not the harlots and publicans, but the religious leaders with their insistence on proper dress and grooming, their careful observance of all the rules, their precious concern for status symbols, their strict legality, their pious patriotism. Longhairs, beards, necklaces, LSD and rock, Big Sur and Woodstock come and go, but Babylon is always there: rich, respectable, immovable. (54-55)

I certainly don't mean to downplay too much the value of Nibley's defense of the Book of Mormon in *Since Cumorah*. Using his wide-ranging linguistic skills and immense reading, he reviews the huge body of materials brought forth in recent years, from the Dead Sea Scrolls and Nag Hammadi library to the many additions to the Apocrypha and pseudepigrapha. Nibley uses an implicit null hypothesis: assume Joseph Smith made up the Book of Mormon, which is so large and diverse and absolute in its historical and religious claims that it should be very easy to falsify, especially with surprising new evidence that contradicts the common wisdom of his time; could you then account for the hundreds of things he got right?

It is hard for a careful reader not to agree that the null hypothesis indeed does *not* account for the available evidence



nearly as well as the opposite assumption, that the Book of Mormon is historical and inspired. And it is hard not to enjoy Nibley's devastatingly witty satire of the scholars, from DeVoto to O'Dea and beyond, who dismiss the book with quite unscholarly religious prejudice—many without bothering to read it.

However, Nibley is perfectly clear that, entertaining as they may be, scholarly “proofs” for the Book of Mormon are “beside the point or of very minor significance in comparison with what the book actually has to say” (*Cumorah*, 338). And his condemnation of anti-Mormon scholars is mild compared to his dismay at Latter-day Saints, including apologist scholars, who seem satisfied to call the Book of Mormon “inspired” but miss the much more important fact that it is “inspiring”: “It claims to contain an enormously important message for whoever is to receive it, and yet until now those few who have been willing to receive it as the authentic word of God have not shown particular interest in that message” (338).

Nibley shows that that message includes not only warnings about the Nephite disease and its sources in greed and pride but a highly specific ethic of pacifism that contradicts much present-day popular Latter-day Saint thought: peace can be worked out after provocation if people will talk “sense instead of heroic clichés,” if leaders will be “willing to humble” themselves, and if subjects will be “willing to have compassion on a hereditary foe.” For instance, the good sense that the Book of Mormon model, Gideon, talks is actually a version of the old anathema, “Better Red than dead”: “It is better that we should be in bondage than that we should lose our lives (Mosiah 20:22)” (*Cumorah*, 341–42).

Nibley takes literally Moroni's claim, “He that smiteth shall be smitten again, of the Lord. Behold what the scripture says—man shall not smite, neither shall he judge” (Mormon 8:19–20; *Cumorah*, 346):

The good people never fight the bad people; they never fight anybody: “It is by the wicked that the wicked are punished; for it is the wicked that stir up the hearts of the children of men unto bloodshed” (Mormon 4:5). We are apt to forget when we read about the heroic resistance of the Nephites to the overwhelming Lamanite power and the noble deeds of the 2,000 youths during the long war, that the gallant Nephites had brought the war upon themselves and were being punished by God. (348)

In 1967 Nibley clearly hoped that things would change as it became clearer to Latter-day Saints how closely the Nephite/Lamanite world resembled our Cold War polarized world—and that they would turn to the Book of Mormon to avoid the Nephite mistakes. But *Approaching Zion* contains essay after essay lament-



ing just the opposite—increasing devotion among Latter-day Saints to seeking riches, with pious quasi-religious rationalizations (“I will get wealthy so I can serve the Church better”) and increasing inclination to “pass by the poor” and to justify violence, even vengeance, against the “bad guys”—exactly the sins that led to the Nephite destruction.

A recent evidence of Nibley’s failure to be heard, even by his own scholarly disciples, was the publication of *Warfare in the Book of Mormon*, a collection of twenty-two essays devoted to showing parallels between the accounts of warfare in the Book of Mormon and information recently discovered about warfare in the ancient world. Most of the authors, though they are his colleagues and editors, apparently have forgotten his insistence that “the ultimate test of the Book of Mormon’s validity is whether or not it really has something to say” (*Cumorah*, 399) and seem never to have been able to actually hear what he claims that something is. I realize that many scholars are sincerely trying to do the basic groundwork in languages, archeology, etc., that can provide what they see as an airtight basis for understanding the text before venturing on interpretation. But that the book was given as a direct ethical and religious message to modern people of whatever education and interpretation is unavoidable. We should use the scholarly insights being developed but also use basic rational and spiritual helps for interpretation—such as consistency with the central teachings of Christ. And we should listen, I believe, to what the scholar who *has* done his homework has to say.

Instead, most of these writers seem to assume that the warfare passages are in the Book of Mormon mainly so apologists like themselves can prove the Book of Mormon is historical, and when, very rarely, they do try to analyze the content, they continue to participate in the “Good guys/bad guys” illusion. One claims that the book provides guidance by which to recognize “agnostic ideas . . . contrary to divine principles” (264) and a challenge to defend “those principles in modern society,” and that it suggests the right way to do so, apparently by bloodshed.

One essay even deals with the most powerful Book of Mormon teaching of the nonviolent ethic (besides Christ’s “Sermon on the Mount” to the Nephites), the account of the rigorously pacifist, death-accepting Anti-Nephi-Lehites, and recognizes the unique way that through them “the message of the Prince of Peace truly brought peace to peoples who were otherwise enemies” (123). But the author seems unable to make any application of this ethic to the Nephites or to modern life.



Nibley's lone essay stands, I believe, as a rebuke to the rest of the book:

It's always the wicked against the wicked in the Book of Mormon, never the righteous against the wicked. . . . When they [Lamanites and Nephites] fight, it is because they are both rebellious against God. Otherwise, there is going to be no fight. (131–32)

We claim defensive strategy today in Europe, Latin America, Africa, the Near East, Southeast Asia, and elsewhere, showing the flag; but armies don't exist to sit still. Their threatening presence and the power to destroy invite combat; it is a challenge to action in the medieval sense. (139–40)

[Mormon, after his people threaten vengeance,] resigns as their commander and says he will have nothing more to do with them. He utterly refuses to avenge his enemy, for the one thing the Lord had absolutely forbidden them to do was to seek vengeance and build up hatred. . . . President Benson is right—he says it all applies to us. That's why I don't like the wars in the Book of Mormon. They make me ill. (143–44)

One disciple who has clearly been able to hear Nibley is Don Norton, editor of *Approaching Zion*. In his foreword he identifies Nibley's central message, “in no place do the scriptures, including the voices of our modern prophets, assent to the goal of amassing the goods of the earth,” and he predicts that the book will be “controversial” and “thoroughly sobering” (x) to Latter-day Saints. Even though Norton lets Nibley repeat some of his messages, with little change, through several essays, there is sufficient change in the evidence and anecdotes that I did not get irritated and actually found the cumulative effect of such repetition indeed sobering.

My one criticism of Norton is that he left out one of Nibley's major addresses that seems to belong here, “Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift,” which was given as the BYU commencement address in April 1983 when Nibley received an honorary degree (published in *Dialogue*, Winter 1983). I watched faces turn ashen on the stand as some people realized he was talking about them and the place they managed:

Where would management be without the inflexible paper processing, dress standards, attention to proper social, political, and religious affiliation, vigilant watch over habits and attitudes, etc. that gratify the stock-holders and satisfy Security? . . . If management favors vile sentimental doggerel verse extolling the qualities that make for success, young people everywhere will be spouting long trade-journal jingles from the stand. . . . If management must reflect the corporate image in tasteless, trendy, new buildings, down come the fine old pioneer monuments.



The Church was full of men in Paul's day teaching that gain is godliness and making others believe it. Today the black robe [of graduation] puts the official stamp of approval on that very proposition. . . . Most of you are here today only because you believe that this charade will help you ahead in the world. . . . Babylon is where we are. (21)

But the Cassandra curse seems to have held: Nibley received no rebuke, but neither is there any evidence that anyone changed from a manager to a leader or stopped using BYU as a way to seek greater wealth. Most of us remain as obtuse as the BYU business professor who recently asked, "If Nibley knows so much about management, then why isn't he rich?" The answer, of course, is "That's why."

Nibley not only implies that BYU business and law students have sold out to the devil (*Zion*, 81–2), but that most of the other students have also (105). He denounces Utah's Congressional delegation in general (246, 480) and specifically decries their promoting militarism, restricting freedoms, and taking antienvironmental stands (442, 472, 476). He calls "those . . . how-to-get-rich books" (236) by rich men that are extremely popular at Deseret Book (which even publishes some) a major seduction toward Babylon, citing them as especially conducive to speculative cruelty rather than the spirit of Zion (358).

What is most amazing—and more evidence of Cassandra-like courage but also irrelevance—is that Nibley delivers his uncompromising jeremiads, with no apparent effect, negative or positive, in the very centers of the Latter-day Saint establishment: BYU commencement, the Cannon-Hinckley Club in Salt Lake, even to gatherings of General Authorities at the LDS Church Office Building. Here is a sample from "Law of Consecration," which was given at Church headquarters and is a good essay to start with for the best summary of Nibley's message and methods:

Are we wasting our time talking about the law of consecration? From the days of Joseph to the present, there has been one insuperable obstacle to the plan, and that is the invincible reluctance of most of the Brethren. When Brigham Young proposed it to the Brethren at Winter Quarters, he could not move them; only one of two of the apostles would listen to him. The rest announced their intention to follow their own plans and get rich.

The dilemma the Saints found themselves in is nowhere better illustrated than in the experience of my grandfather. . . . For some years he managed the United Order sheep and lumber companies in Cache County. Then almost overnight . . . the best lumber was gone. So Charles W. Nibley cast his eyes toward Oregon. . . .



With his partner, David Eccles, he tore into the woods, wiping out miles of unsurveyed forest, acquiring vast stretches of it through manipulation of the Homestead Act, easily paying off government agents. . . . I can tell you the tricks, because he told them to me and laughed about it. . . . He moved into sugar. . . . But there was a child labor law in Oregon, which made beet thinning expensive, and the unions also wanted a share in the take. Nibley frankly made his fortune on stolen timber and child labor. The moral issue? Obviously, the enemy was the government and the unions; it was they who put restraints (which he interpreted as crippling) on his boundless free enterprise, denying men their God-given free agency. It became a standard doctrine among the Latter-day Saints. They pushed this by the conciliation of bishops and well-to-do stake presidents. In his journal he writes, "It has become the custom in the church to give the high seats in the synagogue to men who have made 'money.'" (469–70)

Nibley's main point is that making money as a goal always entails "compromise with principle." He cites as a final example his grandfather's borrowing two million dollars to finish the Hotel Utah and figuring to pay it off in two years by building "the largest and finest bar in the West in the basement. . . . President [Joseph F.] Smith went through the ceiling; which was it to be, the Word of Wisdom or fiscal soundness? The dollar won" (470).

I'm afraid these last examples make Nibley sound like a fearless but mean-spirited, carping iconoclast. He is far from that. No one is more completely devoted to the gospel, the Church, and to the Brethren as what he calls "the chosen servants of God." He humbly lives a consecrated life and plainly speaks what he sees, but without judging his fellow Saints, as individuals, or evil-speaking those in authority. His meek spirit is perhaps best revealed in his discussions of charity, the lack of which he sees as "the fatal weakness" of the Nephites and the greatest danger to modern Latter-day Saints. His aversion to seeking wealth is based on his seeing from the scriptures that such seeking is the "first step in the Nephite disease" (*Cumora*h, 392–93) and that it always ends in vengeance and cruelty—wreaked on plants, animals, the earth itself, and finally humans:

[Utah's fawning over the rich] is marked by an undisguised contempt for anyone without money. My own experience from talking with many transients has shown that nowhere in the nation are tramps more evilly treated than in Utah. So much for the stranger within thy gates. (479)

Nibley fits quite well with Judith Shklar's definition of a liberal as one who thinks that cruelty is the worst thing humans do



(cited in Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, xv). He thinks that cruelty has an economic base and a clear solution: flee Babylon, with its frantic seeking of riches and success and approach the humble and charitable Zion of our Lord Jesus Christ.

At the end of the video prepared by F.A.R.M.S. about Nibley's life, which focuses exclusively on his contributions as our foremost apologist, he is asked by the interviewer what his untiring scholarship has taught him. He dismisses it all as quite ephemeral, and then this Latter-day Saint high priest, the only time that I have seen tears in his eyes, distills the wisdom of his life, gleaned straight from the scriptures: "Repent and forgive," he says, "Repent and forgive."

But Nibley, who knows the Cassandra story well, has long recognized that though repentance is the central message of Christ, it is not a popular doctrine. "In my thirty-five years at BYU," he writes, "I have heard only one sermon (given by Stephen L Richards, incidentally) on repentance. And it was not well received" (*Zion*, 301).