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FOUNDATION FOR ANCIENT RESEARCH AND MORMON STUDIES

Hugh W. Nibley

The Philosophical Implications of Automation

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Summary:

Hugh Nibley discusses the blessing and importance of work in this essay examining temple work, Brigham Young's teachings about abundance and work, and the implications of automation. Nibley suggests that an indispensable prerequisite to choosing our work is fulfilling the principles and conditions of the gospel.

Preliminary Report
Mormon Studies

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The Philosophical Implications of Automation

Ancient Studies

Hugh Nibley
19 March 1964

Listening to Mr. Huff is like listening to Casals play the Bach unaccompanied on the cello. So I'll give you a bar of chopsticks, and then we can get back to Hofer. *Hoffer*.

Now, what he said is entirely in line with what I'd been thinking about here. Certain students of mine here know that I've often said that 90% of the work that's being done right now doesn't need to be done. It's all made work. Over a hundred years ago, when Brigham Young had the Saints in the valley at Salt Lake, a small population, vast work to be done. Yet Brigham Young recognized that there would be a large unemployed all the time. We all know about the wall around the Temple block. That was built as one of his projects. He recognized that society, his society would always have to make work. It would have to be made work, of jobs that don't necessarily need to be done. But how few jobs really do need to be done--necessarily?

Brigham's theory was that God provides everything in abundance, and all man has to do is take it, with a minimum of effort. He says, it's embarrassing. He says, "I've lost everything I had five times." Everything, and within a few years, he'd be a millionaire again, he said, without half trying. The stuff is all there, he says, the world is there, and it's rich. And he believed that wealth exists to be spent. He often used to say, and this may surprise people, not wasted, but spent. He was very frank on that subject of waste. His policy was, when you need something, don't count the cost. He says, "When I want to build a temple, I do not count the cost. That doesn't sound familiar around here, but that was Brigham's policy. He also used to say, and this is a thing that some people don't like, and I quote it, because he said it more than once, "We eat too much, we wear too much, we work too much. If we all ate less, wore less, and worked less, we'd be a better, a happier, and a wiser people." Worked less--imagining Brigham Young saying that! He saw that there is no virtue in mere drudgery. What a machine can do, a machine should do, including digging coal or anything else. Man must be made for something better than that. But what shall it be? Brigham Young quotes Mr. Hofer: He says, "It is to develop our talents."

This was a pet theme of his--he says we are here to develop our talents, that's it. He would say, you know, "Don't let your children go out and herd sheep." He says, they can do it, it's economical, it will save you money, don't let them do it. It requires no talent. Don't let your children herd sheep. Don't let them go out in the field, he used to say. What? In a pioneer economy, that sort of thing? He knew what he was talking about.

Well, so what shall we do? Ancient societies, and Mr. Hofer has touched upon that, too, here's one aspect that's rather interesting, that these ancient societies were largely sacral. That is, an enormous, a vast amount of the wealth and energy of Egypt, for several thousand

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the most stable and

years, was poured into rites and ordinances. It had no practical value whatever. Yet here you have one of the happiest societies, probably the happiest society the world has seen, with a few brief periods as exceptions. Here you had a remarkably stable society. Everybody was employed and happy. But half the work they did was just ritual stuff, it didn't need to be done. Building pyramids, who needs to build a pyramid? They did. It was a project, a public work project--Herodotus tells us that. Well, it was.

Now, we Mormons have a concept of work which is rather unique. We talk about temple "work." And it is work--you get through with a day at the temple, you're exhausted. But it's not the kind of work you think of, that the world understands at all. What is temple work, when you work? It hasn't the remotest resemblance to ordinary work, and yet it is the sort of thing that will engage our energies in the millenium, perhaps, when machines do all the dirty work, as they should.

A while ago Bro. Harold B. Lee said he'd been to a conference the week before, this was a conference. He said he was talking to the authorities of the stake, an insurance man, a banker, a dentist, and so forth, and one of them remarked, "Well, what will I do in the millenium? What is there for me to do in a perfect world? I'm not going to be selling insurance there." No, that's right. The doctor, no he wouldn't be healing anyone, the banker, nobody would need money. All these men decided they were wasting their time here. What is it that really needs to be done? Well, Adam's curse put us under the restraint of eating bread by the sweat of our brow. That was Adam's curse, but is it an economic, or a spiritual restraint? The Doctrine and Covenants, section 49, tells us that the earth provides enough for everybody to begin with. It was so before the Fall, of course it was so in Eden, and it will be so hereafter. That is the normal, eternal state of things, that you won't have to do that kind of work at all. The curse is not that man cannot eat without sweating, because he can--millions of men have lived happy lives without working for it at all. But the curse is that he can't feel good about it. This is where the danger comes in. He can't feel good about it. That shown he's under a curse. It's quite possible to eat your bread without the sweat of your brow, many of us do it. But you don't feel good about it, because you were, . . . Why? There's something wrong here.

Well, during the period of our miserin echesetas, while we're under this curse, so to speak, the blight is not that we have to do dull and rather mechanical things, but that we can't think of anything else to do. That's the trouble. We should think of something else to do. Now the Latter-day Saints believe the curse is soon to be taken away, these are the latter days. Automation may be a prelude to that. We believe we were all made for something better. But one thing is certain, and this is a basic lesson in the Book of Mormon, that the indispensable prerequisite to discover what kind of work it is to be and how we are to do it requires first of all fulfilling the principles and conditions of the gospel. That's why we have this plan, to prepare the world for the millenium. Read any of Joseph Smith or Brigham Young. They talk about that all the time. We are not yet prepared for the work of eternity, but when we are, when it comes to that we will be told what to do. And

TEMPLE
WORK

Automation

I think it's right around the corner. Incidentally, with reference to something Mr. Hofer said, remember Joseph Smith prophesied a number of times that the time would come when this country would be overrun from end to end by mobs. He said, you'll get your fill of mobs. You will see when the whole country will be full of them, there will be such a time of stress ahead. So we can expect these things, but the basic problem is this moral and spiritual one, what are we to do forever and ever? What do you want to do when you do it forever and ever?

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