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Mormon author Hugh Nibley honored with BYU lecture series

By Sara Israelsen-Hartley

Deseret News
Thursday, Jan. 28, 2010

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PROVO, Utah -- Latter-day Saints don't need to lock themselves in a library and pore over ancient Greek and Latin texts the way Hugh Nibley did.

But knowing why they believe what they do is the first step to carrying on his prolific scholarly legacy.

"Having a testimony is a wonderful place to start, but it really is only a place to start," said BYU religion professor Robert Millet, who spoke about Nibley and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as part of a lecture series celebrating Nibley's birth 100 years ago this March.

"We've got to begin getting serious about having Latter-day Saints who not only know the gospel's true, but they know the gospel," Millet finished.

And while that doesn't mean that everyone should study papyri manuscripts, it does require continual curiosity and a thirst for knowledge, said BYU religion professor C. Wilfred Griggs, who also worked with Nibley.

"If we ... only care about this world, we neglect the world to which we want to go," Griggs said. "What (Nibley) was really after was trying to get ... both feet into the world for which we strive. That's what he tried to get us to do, expand our horizon beyond the narrowness of our own view."

Beyond his work as a scholar and prolific writer, Millet said Nibley was at his best as a "social critic" -- someone who could poke and prod members of the LDS church yet still remain an adamant defender of the faith.

Nibley criticized Mormons for being too "Babylon-like" and spending their energy on gaining riches, Millet said. He stressed the importance of grace and gratefulness, and the need to be pure in heart, not just pure in appearance.

As a professor at BYU, Nibley often commented about the attitudes he saw in students, especially as it related to "whether we will seek the

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Weight limitations forced the Utah Hospital Task Force to prioritize before 130 people took off on a chartered 737 for the Haiti Thursday afternoon. [read more](#)



Holding onto hope: search for Susan Powell

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Hugh Nibley honored with BYU lecture series



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kingdom of God first, foremost and finally," Millet said.

"Almost all the young people I know today want to believe that we do not have to make such a drastic choice as between trusting in God entirely and working for money in the bank," Millet said, quoting Nibley. "May I remind you, the choice was deliberately designed to be a hard and searching one."

Nibley believed, as Millet explained, that seeking the kingdom of God first is not an item that can be done once then checked off a list, thus allowing the person to seek for riches and worldly things. Instead, it is a continual, life-long process.

"(Nibley) once remarked, 'The greatest appeal of the gospel in every age has been that it is frankly wonderful, one glorious surprise after another,'" Millet said

A few other 'Niblets,' according to Robert Millet:

The restored gospel is worth and worthy of a lifetime of study.

Although cynicism and skepticism may appear to be fashionable, there's always a vital place for a defender of the faith.

Not everyone in the church needs to be a mirror image of every other person. "I think Hugh enjoyed his eccentricities and he enjoyed people's delight in his eccentricities," Millet said.

High position in the church is not needed in order to exert great influence.

One may actually be a registered Democrat and still have faith.

Even after a life of study and research, the final word comes through revelation.

Loyalty to the Lord's anointed servants need not be surrendered as one's academic reputation grows.

It is not necessary to loosen one's hold on redemptive theology -- especially the doctrines of the fall, atonement and rebirth as taught in the Book of Mormon -- as one becomes more knowledgeable.

Nibley in a nutshell:

Hugh Winder Nibley was born March 27, 1910, in Portland, Ore., and is considered one the most prolific LDS writers and scholars.

Nibley was educated at UCLA and UC Berkeley.

Nibley married Phyllis Anne Hawkes Draper on Sept. 18, 1946, and had eight children. In 1946, Nibley became a professor of history, languages and religion at BYU, and was appointed the first director of BYU's Institute for Ancient Studies in 1973.

Nibley retired in 1975 but continued teaching until 1994, spending the majority of his time in the Harold B. Lee Library working on his "magnum opus": "One Eternal Round," about Facsimile No. 2 in the Book of Abraham, which will be available for purchase in March.

Nibley died Feb. 24, 2005, in his Provo home at the age of 94.

For more on Hugh Nibley:

Attend one of the weekly lectures in the Harold B. Lee Library Auditorium, Thursdays at 7 p.m., in honor of the centennial of his birth.

Attend Nibley's daughter Zina Nibley Petersen's discussion of Nibley's early education today. [View the entire schedule here.](#)

Read "Hugh Nibley: A Consecrated Life," the authorized biography of Hugh Nibley by Boyd Jay Petersen, with a foreword written by Nibley's daughter -- and wife of the author -- Zina Nibley Petersen

To view a list of Nibley's [published works](#).

Read some of [Nibley's unpublished lectures and discourses](#).

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