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One of CENTURY II's primary objectives is to encourage students to prepare papers for publication. The critical thought, exacting research, and careful rewriting necessary to bring a paper up to publishable quality constitute one of the most valuable learning experiences in which students can engage. This section of the journal, "Spotlight," is designed to give attention to BYU faculty members and students who have a noteworthy record of publication. We hope their work will inspire us to aim for higher standards of excellence than are necessary to get a degree or a good class grade. And we want their work to be more widely read, so that it may leave the University.

There really was little question as to whom we should spotlight first. Not only has Hugh Nibley often been referred to as the most important scholar the Church has ever had, but he is also the University's exemplar of the publishing scholar.

The interview that follows was conducted by Janice Hirst and Scott Lewis at the beginning of August. The selected bibliography was prepared by Professor Louis C. Midgley.

CENTURY II: When you were an undergraduate student, how did you pursue knowledge? What was your philosophy?

Nibley: I used Scaliger's method, or the method of the Renaissance scholars.

CENTURY II: What was that method?

Nibley: You have to have as broad a field as possible, and as deep a field as possible. If it's too broad, then it's shallow. And if it's very deep, of course, it's too spe-

cialized, so you have to be both broad and deep—you have to be both. To do this, you have to cover many fields, but how do you cover them all? You have to work just one at a time. This is what they did in the Renaissance times. Documents would come in, just discovered, from Constantinople and places like that, and they said: "How are we going to classify them? How are we going to find out what's in them? What are they all about?" They'd put them in piles, which is what you

have to do. The best pile, of course, is by language. Then you'd arrange these piles in chronological order, too, you see. Egyptian would have been over here, and Hebrew, and your Greek, and your Arabic, and so forth. Then you would spend a week on this pile—you can't just spend a day, because that doesn't get you far enough. If you had a limited number of piles, five or six, then you would start on the circle again.

CENTURY II: Do you choose a topic?

Nibley: You don't choose a topic—no—you choose a pile of texts. Then you arrange them in the best order you can, chronologically, in a particular language. Then you read all the Greek writers in order—that's what I've been doing for years and years. Read through the Latin writers chronologically, read through the Icelandic writers chronologically, and so on. By the time you've gone around the circle and come back weeks later where you got started, this had already gotten cold [pointing to an imaginary pile]. So I had to do it a little faster—I had to start making a three-day cycle. I started to get impatient. I tried to make the cycle in one day. But, you see, just when you get excited, just when you get interested in something, you have to leave it to go into another field the next day, and you don't want to do that. You have to have at least enough time to finish up. Three days will get you deep enough so that it will leave an impression to be remembered for the next time you come around. And yet you go fast enough so that you wouldn't be lost. The

reason you have to force yourself to move from one to another is that the thing gets exciting and you must read it. Hopefully, you have to move to the next one, regardless because you'd get stuck with one and you'd never get off that pile.

CENTURY II: So your philosophy about gaining knowledge is an historical approach?

Nibley: Well, that happens to be what I am doing, yes. It has to do with the records of the race, and so forth, because what we have about the past is all we have to show for our existence—the past is all there is.

CENTURY II: Was history your initial field of study in college?

Nibley: No. Originally, science was going to be my field. But when I was on my mission I realized what was being ignored completely were the documents—nobody was reading the documents. They had all already been discovered—and there they were. Well, when I studied at Berkeley, Popper taught all the Greek, all the Arabic and all the Hebrew—one teacher! Today they have twenty in the department of Arabic and more than that in the department of Greek. And yet just in my time there was one teacher who took care of the whole thing because they thought it wasn't necessary to have more. I was the only student in those classes.

CENTURY II: Would you say then, that these historical documents cover science?

Nibley: Well, no. But they are a part of it. As I say, there are 350,000 professional scientists in America today. There were nearly this many yesterday, but how many were

studying the documents—no body. At that time there were three or four people studying Egyptian. And so I said to myself, "Here is an obligation. You have to be where you are wanted. This material is just as real, just as tangible, just as scientific as what you get from fossils and stars, and chemicals and things like that. The record of the human race is just as much a document as all these other documents." That is why I started reading the piles in that order. For a couple of years I compromised and majored in sociology, but I soon realized that the lab notes and fieldnotes of the human race are here in ancient documents. They are not in *The Family Weekly* where some sociologist tells us tall people tend to prefer custard to reading about submarines or something like that. It's completely absurd, but we get these correlations, you know. They call it being scientific, but it's not.

CENTURY II: So would you say that you are interpreting these things for the modern world?

Nibley: It's the same thing as science—we have to try to get a picture of the world. Scholarship does that, the artist does it better, the gifted artist does it the best. We are beginning to realize that the Cartesian ideal of breaking things down into discreet particles and measuring mathematical units will not give you the ultimate explanation. It's like—who was it?—Sir Arthur Thompson. As an anthropologist, he goes out and measures all the Chinamen. He takes thousands of measurements and then puts them all together and you get a Chinaman. But why break it

down so you can re-assemble it again? What I'm saying is that the artist does not see things on the superficial level at all. He's the person who sees the Nightingale as a bird, just as much as a person who sees it as so many molecules, or breaks it down into organs. Put it together and you have a Nightingale. The person who looks at that, admires it, enjoys its singing—that's the ultimate experience. He's the scientist, not the character who tells us what kind of chemicals the Nightingale secretes while it is singing. You could do that, too. They are both legitimate, but at very different levels. The best level is that of the artist.

CENTURY II: What about the common conception of BYU as a giant-size high school instead of a really scholarly university?

Nibley: This is one thing people think of BYU, but all people have to do is go somewhere else and there's no difference. Students at BYU are not sophisticated, and they're not involved in these everlasting discussions and bull-sessions, which themselves become a cult. Actually, students here may be dumb but they're not affected. The condition at BYU has always been this: average very low, but individuals very high. We have the best. Here and there—just maybe three or four in every department. They are good enough to be better than anybody else in the world. And that is what has kept BYU going. It's amazing what we come up with, astonishing. They could hold their own anywhere. BYU will not prevent you from learning. But it won't make you learn anything either—you don't

have to learn anything.

CENTURY II: What do you aim for in the writings you prepare for publication?

Nibley: Years ago when I wrote the 1957 Priesthood Manual, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, the committee turned down every chapter. But President McKay overruled the committee on every chapter. Every one of them. He said that if it's over their heads, let them reach for it. And he left every chapter just as I had it. The committee fumed at the mouth and said, "We can't have it!" and he turned right

around and said, "We jolly well have it! Let them work at it a little." I was a very good friend of Brother Richard L. Evans, and always used to tell me, "always write as if you were writing to the tiredest farmer in Koosharem." You are writing to the tiredest farmer in Koosharem, what do you do to keep him awake? No attention span, no interest or anything. He's just tired, dead farmer. If he's the one you have to write for, you're certainly going to lose your audience in a hurry. I never obeyed the counsel.

A Selected Bibliography

Books

- 1952 1. *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1952). Evidence from the Near East and New World that support Book of Mormon claims to historical authenticity.
- 1954 2. *The World and the Prophets* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2nd "enlarged edition" 1962). A series of lectures that define the unique qualities of prophets, contrast to scholars, mystics, reformers, and other worldly vocations.
- 1957 3. *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Council of the Twelve Apostles, 1957; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1964). Originally published as the lesson manual for the Melchizedek Priesthood Quorums of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Duplicate and enlarged adaptation of *Lehi in the Desert and The World of the Jaredites*.
- 1961 4. *The Myth Makers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1961). An examination of the early criticisms of Joseph Smith.
- 1963 5. *Sounding Brass* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1963). Subtitled "Informal Studies of the Lucrative Art of Telling Stories about Brigham Young and the Mormons: a response to Irving Wallace's *The Twenty-seventh Wife* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961).
- 1967 7. *Since Cumorah: The Book of Mormon in the Modern World* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1967). Additional historical, philological and scientific evidences relating to the Book of Mormon.
- 1970 8. *When the Lights Went Out: Three Studies on the Ancient Apostasy* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970). A collection of the essays numbered 21, 22, and 23 in this bibliography.
9. *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975). A translation and analysis of an Egyptian text, and of other ancient ritual texts, that relate to Latter-day Saint temple ritual.

Pamphlets

- 1964 10. *No, Ma'am, That's Not History: A Brief Review of Mrs. Brodie's Reluctant Vindication of the Prophet She Seeks to Expose* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1946). A short, witty reply to Fawn Brodie's *No Man Knows My History* (2nd ed.; New York: Knopf, 1971).
- 1963 11. *What Is a Temple? The Idea of the Temple in History* (Provo: BYU Press, 2nd ed., 1968).

There is only one place I can try to overcome evil, only one place I can fight my battle, and that is the point where I am defective in faith, hope and charity. The scriptures are very explicit on this. The enemy we are marching against is sin.

The danger of polarization, which is taking place in the world today, is that we try to renounce our sins by denouncing them. We have an obsession with ^{the} enemy. It is a mockery of the gospel of repentance. If we fight the battle where we are told to--(in our hearts)--then we cannot lose. Joseph Smith said that Satan cannot, and God will not, force the human mind.

