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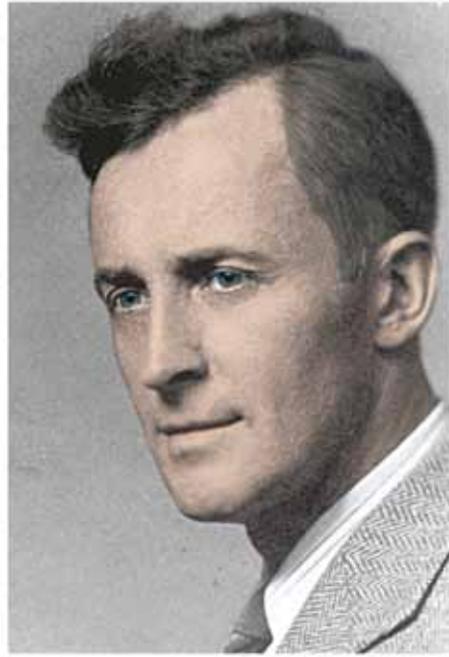
**Title** Nibley and the Environment

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**Reference** *Journal of the Book of Mormon and Other Restoration Scripture* 20/2 (2011): 16-29.

**ISSN** 1948-7487 (print), 2167-7565 (online)

**Abstract** Hugh Nibley cared deeply about creation and was passionate about our stewardship over the earth. His arguments in defense of the environment were informed by the disciplines he knew best: history, philosophy, and theology. From his study, research, and reasoning, Nibley drew several principles that seem to have directed his thoughts and crafted his sense of environmental stewardship. Four of these principles are discussed in this paper: (1) humankind has a divine mandate to properly care for creation; (2) humankind's spiritual health and environmental health are linked; (3) creation obeys, reverences, and provides for humankind, as humankind righteously cares for creation; and (4) humankind should not sacrifice environmental health for temporal wealth.



Hugh Nibley, ca. 1947.

# NIBLEY AND THE ENVIRONMENT

TERRY B. BALL



I am honored to participate in this lecture series remembering the studies, life, and legacy of Professor Hugh Nibley. I did not have the privilege of personally knowing Professor Nibley. He retired before I joined the faculty at BYU, but I do happen to have two stories to contribute to the corpus of Nibley lore—both of which, in contrast to many others I have heard, I know to be actually true! Story 1: As part of my master’s degree research I did a study of the ritual theory of myth and its application to the ancient Near East—a topic about which Nibley had much to say. I quoted the good professor several times in the subsequent paper I wrote on the topic and submitted a draft to Nibley’s esteemed bibliographer, Gary Gillum, for review. To this day I am uncertain whether one sentence in the draft I

sent to Gillum contained a typo or a Freudian slip. In that sentence I meant to write “according to Hugh Nibley,” but somehow I managed to substitute the letter *i* for the *u* in *Hugh*. Consequently, the sentence read “according to High Nibley.” I much appreciated Gillum’s sense of humor when, rather than suggesting a correction, he simply wrote above the sentence “perhaps.”

Later, while working on my PhD here at BYU, Geza Vermes, the renowned Dead Sea Scrolls scholar, came to give a lecture on campus. I arrived at the lecture hall a little early to hear Dr. Vermes and saw Professor Nibley sitting in the front row. Thinking it an opportunity to get close to the legend, I quietly slipped in a seat in the row just behind him (I wanted to be able to boast to my wife that I sat next



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Nibley saw the lordship given to Adam as a responsibility to bless and care for those under his dominion. *Paradise*, by Roelandt Savery.

to Hugh Nibley that day.) Shortly after I took my seat, Dr. Vermes arrived. As he made his way to the front, he spotted Professor Nibley and stopped to talk to him. I enjoyed eavesdropping on their conversation. Speaking as one crony to another, Vermes asked how Nibley was doing. With his eyes fixed on Vermes's balding white head and likely thinking of his own as well, the elderly Nibley responded in Hebrew, "Yesh sheleg al heharim" (There is snow on the mountains). His comment elicited a chuckle from Vermes. I suspect there was something of both humor and pathos meant by Nibley's response.

While I did not have the chance to know Nibley from personal interaction, like many of you, I feel I have come to know him somewhat through his

scholarship. This evening I have been asked to review his thoughts and writings on a rather controversial issue—the environment. Nibley cared deeply about creation and was passionate about our stewardship concerning it. He was fierce in his defense of nature, seeming to feel that in this battle, truth did not need tact—just expression.

A popular folktale concerning Nibley claims that rather than give in to the political and neighborhood pressure to keep his lawn mowed, the eccentric professor simply bought a goat and staked it out in his yard to eat the grass down. His son-in-law and biographer Boyd Petersen observes that while this tale is false, it does reflect Nibley's dislike for "the idea of trimming or cutting down any living thing"—a

## FROM THE EDITOR:

As part of a weekly lecture series honoring the hundredth anniversary of the birth of Hugh W. Nibley, Terry B. Ball, dean of BYU Religious Education and a trained archaeobotanist, was asked to speak on Dr. Nibley's views on the environment. This presentation was delivered on 11 February 2010. Those of us who remember Hugh with fondness and are aware of his ahead-of-his-time views, whether we agree with him entirely or not, will appreciate Dr. Ball's judicious discussion of those views.

dislike, Petersen suggests, that grew out of Nibley's childhood experiences in the "the lush green forests of Oregon," witnessing "their destruction at the hands of his own grandfather."<sup>1</sup>

As God's appointed caretakers of creation, Nibley felt we should labor to improve our environment. He appreciated Brigham Young's counsel on how the Saints were to care for the earth.

As we might expect, Nibley's arguments in defense of the environment were not much informed by science but, rather, by the disciplines he knew better: history, philosophy, and theology (he especially resonated with the teachings of Brigham Young on the subject). From these beloved disciplines Nibley drew several principles that seem to have directed his thoughts and influenced his sense of our environmental stewardship.

### **Principle 1: Humankind has a divine mandate to properly care for creation.**

In a piece first printed in the October 1972 *New Era* entitled "Man's Dominion," Nibley tackled the question of what exactly God meant in Genesis 1:28 when he commanded Adam and Eve to "subdue" and have "dominion" over the earth.<sup>2</sup> He explained that the Hebrew terms *kivshū* and *rdū*, translated respectively as "subdue" and "have dominion" in the KJV, "both have a basic root meaning of exerting pressure—that being, however, merely a point of

departure for a whole spectrum of derivatives." He noted that "according to individual taste and temperament," translators of the terms have variously interpreted them to mean to "plow," to "violate," or to "cherish."<sup>3</sup>

Nibley felt that a clue to the true intent of the commandment to *kivshū* and *rdū* could be found in Moses 5:1, "And it came to pass that after I, the Lord God, had driven them out, that Adam began to *till* the earth, and to have *dominion* over all the beasts of the field, and to eat his bread by the sweat of his brow" (Moses 5:1). He observed that in this passage the word *till* replaces *subdue* and applies specifically to the earth, while having dominion applies to animals. He then noted that after God commanded the animals to multiply and have joy, he gave the same commandment to Adam and made him "lord" over the whole earth and gave him dominion over it. Accordingly, he reasoned, "lordship and *dominium* are the same thing." Drawing on the original meanings



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Clearcut logging on the Olympic Peninsula. Nibley was profoundly affected by his grandfather's logging methods in the Northwest.

of the terms, he further pointed out that the words refer to one who is “the lord of a household,” one

who has the responsibility to be a benefactor and care for those under his dominion. Thus, he summarized, man is not to be “a predator, a manipulator, or an exploiter of other creatures but one who cooperates with nature as a diligent husbandman.”<sup>4</sup>

Nibley observed that “the ancients” equated this dominion or lordship with priesthood, “the power to act for God and in His place.”<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Brigham Young taught that “the Spirit of the Lord and the keys of the priesthood . . . hold power over all animated beings.”<sup>6</sup> Thus man is to be in charge of the things God created and see that they are preserved and cared for on God's behalf.<sup>7</sup>

As God's appointed caretakers of creation, Nibley felt we should labor to improve our environment. He appreciated Brigham Young's counsel on how the Saints were to care for the earth. The

Brigham Young taught the Saints to care for and respect the land that they were struggling to make fruitful. Maynard Dixon (1875–1946), *The Hand of God*, 1940, oil on masonite, 21 x 39<sup>1</sup>/<sub>8</sub> inches.



Brigham Young University Museum of Art, gift of Edith Hamlin Dixon.



Brigham Young taught the Saints “to render the earth so pleasant . . . that angels may delight to come and visit” (*Journal of Discourses*, 8:83).

prophet instructed, “There is a great work for the Saints to do. Progress, and improve upon, and make beautiful everything around you. Cultivate the earth and cultivate your minds. Build cities, adorn your habitations, make gardens, orchards, and vineyards, and render the earth so pleasant that when you look upon your labours you may do so with pleasure, and that angels may delight to come and visit your beautiful locations.” Nibley commented, “For Brigham, improvement meant ‘to build in strength and stability, to beautify, to adorn, to embellish, to delight, and to cast a fragrance over the House of the Lord; with sweet instruments of music and melody.’”<sup>8</sup>

Specifically, Nibley observed, “the one way man can leave his mark on the whole face of nature without damage is to *plant*, and President Young ceaselessly counseled his people to do as Adam was commanded to do in Eden—when he dressed and tended the garden: Our work is ‘to beautify the whole face of the earth, until it shall become like the garden of Eden.’” As the prophet declared, “The very object of our existence here is to handle the temporal elements of this world and subdue the earth, multiplying those organisms of plants and animals God has designed shall dwell upon it.”<sup>9</sup> Nibley felt Brigham Young gave the wisest summary of what man’s dominion of the earth means, “Let me love the world as [God] loves it, to

make it beautiful, and glorify the name of my Father in heaven. It does not matter whether I or anybody else owns it, if we only work to beautify it and make it glorious, it is all right.”<sup>10</sup>

Humankind has a divine mandate to properly care for creation.

## **Principle 2: Spiritual health and environmental health are linked.**

On 16 February 1989, Nibley delivered a speech titled “Stewardship of the Air” at a Clean Air Symposium held at Brigham Young University.<sup>11</sup> He opened the speech by commenting on the “miasmatic exhalations” of Geneva Steel that he had been obliged to breathe over the past forty years of his life. He then observed that

we learn even from the Word of Wisdom, body and mind—the temporal and the spiritual—are inseparable, and to corrupt the one is to corrupt the other. Inevitably our surroundings become a faithful reflection of our mentality and vice versa. The right people, according to Brigham Young, could convert hell to heaven, and the wrong ones heaven to hell. “Every faculty bestowed upon man is subject to contamination—subject to be diverted from the purpose the Creator designed it to fill.”<sup>12</sup>

Nibley continued, “This principle meets us in the law of Moses: ‘Ye shall not pollute the land wherein ye are: for blood it defileth the land. . . . Defile not therefore the land which ye shall inhabit, wherein I dwell: for I the Lord dwell among the children of Israel’ (Numbers 35:33-34).” Then turning to the Doctrine and Covenants, Nibley added, “Today we are told that ‘the whole world lieth in sin, and groaneth under darkness and under the bondage of sin. . . . For shall the children of the kingdom pollute my holy land?’ (D&C 84:49, 59). ‘I have promised . . . their restoration to the land of Zion. . . . Nevertheless, if they pollute their inheritances, they shall be thrown down; for I will not spare them if they pollute their inheritances’ (D&C 103:13-14).”<sup>13</sup>

Like Brigham Young, Nibley seemed to feel that wickedness could pollute the land just as much as industry. As the Saints first settled in the Great Basin, Brigham Young admonished them, “You are here commencing anew. The soil, the air, the water are all pure and healthy. Do not suffer them to become polluted with wickedness. Strive to preserve the elements from being contaminated by the filthy, wicked conduct and sayings of those who pervert the intelligence God has bestowed upon the human family.”<sup>14</sup> Nibley resonated with the prophet’s instructions to “keep your valley pure, keep your towns as pure as you possibly can, keep your hearts pure, and labour what you can consistently, but not so as to injure yourselves. Be faithful in your religion. Be full of love and kindness towards each other.” Commenting on Brigham Young’s instructions, Nibley observed,

“There is nothing mysterious or abstruse in this identifying of the defilement of man with the defilement of nature.”<sup>15</sup>

Nibley found an endorsement for the doctrine in a bicentennial address delivered by President Spencer W. Kimball.

But when I review the performance of this people in comparison with what is expected, I am appalled and frightened. Iniquity seems to abound. The Destroyer seems to be taking full advantage of the time remaining to him in this, the great day of his power. . . . I have the feeling that the good earth can hardly bear our presence upon it. . . . The Brethren constantly cry out against that which is intolerable in the sight of the Lord: against pollution of mind, body, and our surroundings.<sup>16</sup>

The ability to appreciate the beauties and wonders of nature is a spiritual gift. That gift—that ability to appreciate nature and loathe its destruction—has been essential to our survival.

Indeed, Nibley felt that spiritual health was to be found in nature. Drawing again from the teachings of Brigham Young, he observed, “At a time when ‘free as air’ signified that a thing was of negligible worth, Brigham Young was insisting that the greatest physical asset the Saints possessed and one they should treasure most highly was pure air. ‘What constitutes health, wealth, joy, and peace? In the first place, good pure air is the greatest sustainer of animal life.’ ‘The Lord blesses the land, the air and the water where the Saints are permitted to live.’”<sup>17</sup>

The ability to appreciate the beauties and wonders of nature is a spiritual gift, in Nibley’s opinion. He agreed with Brigham Young’s teaching “‘When the Spirit of revelation from God inspires a man, his mind is opened to behold the beauty, order, and glory of the creation of this earth.’”<sup>18</sup> That gift—that ability to appreciate nature and loathe its destruction—has been essential to our survival, Nibley observed. “Without being able to tell exactly why,” he said, “we take immediate offense at such statements, made by men in high positions, as ‘I do not believe in conservation for conservation’s sake,’ or ‘I do not believe in clean water for the sake of clean water.’ But we



© Robert Winslow.

Nibley complained about the “miasmatic exhalations” produced by some industries.

soon learn that our shocked first reaction is a healthy one; when the forest is reduced to the now proverbial one redwood, it is too late.”<sup>19</sup> “The voice of revelation has told the Saints . . . where to put their priorities,” Nibley declared; as the Lord said, “‘And out of the ground made I, the Lord God, to grow every tree, naturally, that is pleasant to the sight of man; and man could behold it’ (Moses 3:9). Trees were made in the first instance to be looked at and enjoyed,” Nibley continued. “We are aware of that before research and experience show our intuition to be quite sound—but the feeling for beauty must come first if we are to survive.”<sup>20</sup> “‘We should love the earth,’ says Brigham. ‘We should love the works which God has made. This is correct; but we should love them in the Lord.’ We should look forward to a time when this earth ‘will be given to the Saints, when they and it are sanctified and glorified.’”<sup>21</sup>

Spiritual health and environmental health are linked.

### **Principle 3: Creation obeys, reverences, and provides for man, as man righteously cares for creation.**

Nibley mingled the teachings of latter-day prophets with ideas and traditions from Jewish midrashic, mystical, pseudepigraphic, and apocryphal texts to teach that as God’s appointed steward over creation, man enjoys the reverence and cooperation of nature only as he righteously and lovingly rules over and cares for it.

Brigham Young taught that “the dominion God gives man is designed to test him, to enable him to show to himself, his fellows, and all the heavens just how he would act if entrusted with God’s own power.”

Nibley noted that the *Zohar*, the foundational work of Jewish mystical thought known as Kabbalah, teaches that “even the fierce beasts of prey fear man . . . as long as he keeps his covenant, his kingly dignity, and his eye fixed on God in whose image he is” and concludes that “God formed man in his own heavenly form and made him to be Lord over them.

Whenever man stands upright and lifts his eyes toward heaven, then all the animals raise their heads too, and look to man, fearing and trembling in his presence.”<sup>22</sup> Nibley found in other ancient Jewish literature traditions that Adam, Noah, and Abraham each had exceptionally nurturing and loving relationships with the creatures of the earth and were blessed for and by it.<sup>23</sup>

However, if man fails in his duty to care for creation, disaster follows. The second-century-BC writings of Ben Sirach teach that “‘the rule over the world is in the hand of God . . . and at the right time He setteth over it one that is worthy,’” but, Nibley summarizes, “‘if that rule is ever exercised in an arbitrary or arrogant manner, it is quickly taken away and given to someone else.’” Furthermore, the pseudepigraphic *Book of Adam and Eve* warns Adam, if you fail in your duty, “‘the beasts, over whom thou didst rule, shall rise up in rebellion against thee, for thou hast not kept my commandment’”; and, Nibley adds, “‘all creatures are quick to recognize the hand of the oppressor and impostor.’”<sup>24</sup> According to what Nibley describes as “‘one of the best-known teachings of the Jews,’” “‘when man (Israel in particular) falls away from God, all nature becomes his enemy.’”<sup>25</sup>

Nibley saw in these ancient texts an endorsement for what he recognized as a “favorite theme” of Brigham Young, which, he summarized, teaches that “‘the dominion God gives man is designed to test him, to enable him to show to himself, his fellows, and all the heavens just how he would act if entrusted with God’s own power; if he does not act in a godlike manner, he will never be entrusted with a creation of his own, worlds without end.’” All the rest of God’s creations will surely abide by God’s commandments and progress to exaltation, but man will only join them in paradise and happiness by doing the same. Nibley saw in this doctrine an admonition to “‘proceed with reverence and care’” and scolded that “‘it is only because the Latter-day Saints are ignorant of these things, according to President Young, that God has not already cursed them for their brutal and callous treatment of God’s other creatures.’”<sup>26</sup> He further reminded us that while Aristotle, the doctors of Alexandria, and normative Judaism and Christianity reject the notion that animals have any rights or ability to reason or speak, the Latter-day Saints “‘have divine knowledge’” that each creature God created has a spirit, was created



Erich Lessing / Art Resource, NY.

Nibley explained that “God and Satan both presented plans of dominion to Adam and then to his son Cain. The father chose one plan, the son the other.” *Cain and Abel*, by Palma Giovane.

spiritually before receiving a body, and, as President Joseph F. Smith taught, has “an equal right to live.”<sup>27</sup> Nibley summarized, “Granted there are different levels and degrees that exist within as well as between species, still it is the privilege of every form of life to multiply in its sphere and element and have joy therein. Adam’s dominion was a charge to see to it that all went well with God’s creatures; it was not a license to exterminate them.”<sup>28</sup>

Nibley saw irreverent treatment of creation as a rejection of the gospel and reminded all that Brigham Young warned, “Where people refuse the gospel . . . that land eventually . . . will become desolate, forlorn, and forsaken,” for nature will refuse “her bounties.”<sup>29</sup> “Having made himself allergic to almost everything by the Fall,” Nibley explains, “man is given the choice of changing *his* nature so that the animal and vegetable creation will cease to afflict and torment him, or else of waging a truceless war of extermination against all that annoys him until he renders the earth completely uninhabitable.”<sup>30</sup>

But, as we righteously and gently use the earth and its resources, it willingly provides for us, Nibley believed. He reminded us that

the products of the earth are “to please the eye [that always comes first!] and to gladden the heart; yea, for food and for raiment, for taste and for smell, . . . to be used with judgment, not to excess, neither by extortion” (D&C 59:18-20). We may neither waste nor exploit what we find around us; Merriam-Webster defines *extortion* as the obtaining “from an unwilling or reluctant person by physical force, intimidation, or the abuse of legal or official authority.” We have a right to take what we need, but when we would extend that right to justify taking things we do not need, that is extortion, and is expressly forbidden: “It is our privilege and our duty,” says Brigham Young, “to search all things upon the face of the earth, and learn what there is for man to enjoy, what God has ordained for the benefit and happiness of mankind, and then make use of it without sinning against him.” Sinning against him? “It is not our privilege to waste the Lord’s substance.”<sup>31</sup>

This understanding appears to have led Nibley to be a promoter of recycling. He wrote, “All waste on this earth becomes garbage—*waste* is in fact the proper English word for garbage. To throw anything on the trash heap is to cast it aside in contempt; what do we know about its true worth? Who are we to despise what we do not understand?” Nibley reminded us of Brigham’s counsel, “*Never*

*let anything go to waste. Be prudent, save everything.* Even sewage has its uses: ‘Everything, also, which will fertilize our gardens and our fields should be sedulously saved and wisely husbanded, that nothing may be lost which contains the elements of food and raiment for man and sustenance for beast.’<sup>32</sup>

Creation obeys, reverences, and provides for man, as man righteously cares for creation.

**Principle 4: We should not sacrifice environmental health on the altar of temporal wealth.**

Nibley was deeply troubled by the refusal of some Latter-day Saints to recognize the sanctity of all life. To illustrate his distress he recounted the following experience.

One morning just a week after we had moved into our house on Seventh North, as I was leaving for work, I found a group of shouting, arm-waving boys gathered around the big fir tree in the front yard. They had sticks and stones and in a state of high excitement were fiercely attacking the lowest branches of the tree, which hung to the ground. Why? I asked. There was a quail in the tree, they said in breathless zeal, a quail! Of course, said I, what is wrong with that? But don’t you see, it is a live quail, a wild one! So they just *had* to kill it. They were on their way to the old B[righam] Y[oung] High School and were Boy Scouts. Does this story surprise you? What surprised me was when I later went to Chicago and saw squirrels running around the city parks in broad daylight—they would not last a day in Provo.<sup>33</sup>

He blamed the boys’ malicious actions on the teachings of their leaders, even in the church, lamenting that “like Varro’s patrician friends, we have taught our children by precept and example that every living thing exists to be converted into cash, and that whatever would not yield a return should be quickly exterminated to make way for creatures that do.” He called this vicious doctrine the Mahan Principle, referring to the “great secret” that Satan revealed to Cain (Moses 5:31), that one may kill to enrich oneself.<sup>34</sup> In his mind, the killing included not only the taking of life, but also the destruction of nature.

Nibley understood the Mahan Principle taught by Satan to be directly opposed to what God intended when he gave man dominion over the earth. Mahan’s doctrine is a wicked counterfeit for true and righteous dominion. Master Mahans exercise dominion over the earth by exploiting it for wealth and power with no regard for the sanctity of life or the well-being of the environment, while Adamic stewards exercise dominion by nurturing, protecting, and reverencing creation. Nibley explained that “God and Satan both presented plans of dominion to Adam and then to his son Cain. The father chose one plan, the son the other.” Nibley observed that according to early Jewish literature, Noah and Abraham were likewise offered the choice between the two types of



Alfredo Dagli-Orti / Art Resource, NY.

Nibley summarizes, “[Pluto] brutally kidnaps the fair Proserpine, who represents all the beauty and harmony of nature, to establish his claim over the earth.” *The Rape of Proserpina*, by Luigi Basiletti.

dominion, as was Moses when Satan tempted him, “If thou . . . wilt worship me, all shall be thine” (Luke 4:7; compare Moses 1:12–19).<sup>35</sup>

He saw Pluto of Hades, the underworld god of wealth as another ancient example of a Master Mahan. “All the riches of gems and precious metals hidden beneath the earth are his, but he owns no property above the ground,” so, Nibley summarizes, “he brutally kidnaps the fair Proserpine, who represents all the beauty and harmony of nature, to establish his claim over the earth.”<sup>36</sup> Nibley graphically described the abduction:

Pluto, in his black *quadriga* or black stretch limousine, sweeps out of his subterranean realm amidst choking clouds of sulphur dioxide, carbon monoxide, and assorted particles, and snatches Proserpine away from the scene to go down and live with him as a very rich but unhappy bride. . . . With her departure all the upper world becomes as dull and gloomy as Pluto’s own busy factories, foundries, and smelters. This makes Pluto’s claim to rule over the earth complete. He takes the treasures of the earth and with them creates the wealth and the armaments that enable him to rule through the ages with blood and horror.<sup>37</sup>

Nibley observed that in earliest mythology Pluto was an agrarian figure, but with advancing society was transformed into a wealthmonger—much like Cain, who too began as a farmer and then turned to murder and plunder.<sup>38</sup> He saw both as types for the Destroyer, the Prince of Darkness, who is “most often and most widely described as the lord of the underworld who sits in his Stygian realm upon all the mineral treasures of the earth, worked by toiling slaves amidst foul and pestilential vapors.” He continued, “Our lord of the underworld rules under many names—Satan, Loki, Mammon, Mulciber, Hephaestus, etc.; and his workers are the gnomes, trolls, kobolds, the dwarfs, and other grimy, hard-working creatures.” He saw this characterization of mines, miners, and its effect on the environment as “plainly taken from prehistoric mining regions such as the immensely old Varna works in Yugoslavia [Bulgaria] and others in Asia Minor and Cyprus” and from Spain “with its blighted regions of mines, smelters, and foundries—all worked by starving, filthy, driven slaves, converting the landscape into barren wastes of slag and stunted vegetation.”<sup>39</sup>

Not surprisingly, Nibley’s review of the historical and mythical characterization of mine workers as oppressed gnomes, trolls, kobolds, and the dwarfs earned him the ire of Utah County residents whose livelihood depended on Geneva Steel. Some were deeply offended, feeling he was putting them in the

Since it is a preacher’s duty to make himself understood, when he fails he owes his hearers an apology.

same class. It created enough of a public outcry that Nibley felt compelled to write a letter to the editor of the local newspaper clarifying his comments [in his talk “Stewardship of the Air”]. The opening of the letter reads:

Dear Sir:

People often say they do not understand me. They say it so often that I should have the sense to shut up in public. And now I have gone and done it again. Since it is a preacher’s duty to make himself understood, when he fails he owes his hearers an apology. And I fail every time I step into the past, where I prefer to spend my days. There my students lose me. The past simply does not exist for us today, except in old costume movies revived on TV. So the idea of the age-old confrontation between agriculture and industry in days long past rings no bells.

For example, nothing is more beyond dispute than that people who worked in mines and mills have throughout history been underpaid and overworked, living in unspeakably dismal conditions. Most of them right down to modern times have, in fact, been slaves. I have written feelingly about them. But to interpret the above statement as a description of the workers at Geneva, where friends and relatives of mine have worked from the beginning at far better wages than I ever received, is about as far as misunderstanding can go. And to say that it depicts them as hideous and deformed dwarves, forging the fatal Rheingold, either makes me the world’s worst communicator or denotes a hair-trigger predisposition to jump at conclusions.

Nibley closed the letter with resignation.

Time did not allow me to give the conclusion to the talk, which was to declare that I no longer worry much about Geneva, that the only time it really got to me was on those sweet spring nights when every breath from the west reminded me of what I was missing. Unfortunately, breathing was not optional

or I could have escaped that prejudice too. Today I see in Geneva a smoking fumarole at the base of a mighty volcano which is just about to blow. . . . I take small comfort in the conviction that before long circumstances are going to settle the problem for us.

Sincerely,  
Hugh Nibley<sup>40</sup>

Nibley's closing conviction proved prophetic. The mill stumbled along for another decade and then went bankrupt in 1999, closing forever in November of 2002.

He mocked and derided the insensitive, money-groping modern bureaucrats, politicians, industrialists, attorneys, and businessmen whose wealth-driven myopia prevented them from seeing the beauty and significance of these ancient people and their lands.

Nibley felt that few in the history of the world have been able to resist Satan's Mahan bargain that requires one to sacrifice the life and the welfare of the environment on the altar of wealth. "The first to accept was Cain, who 'loved Satan more than God'" (Moses 5:18). "The 'great secret' of success that he learned from his new teacher [Satan] was that he could get anything in this world by the calculated use of force, with no need to be ashamed since it could all be done in the sacred name of freedom; instead of being appalled at the blood on his hands, Cain 'gloried in that which he had done, saying: I am free; surely the flocks of my brother falleth into my hands.'" Later, according to ancient Jewish literature, Noah's son Ham bought into Satan's version of oppressive dominion, followed by Nimrod—both exploited creatures and creation for their own gain. All this fits Satan's designs well, Nibley observes, for he is "spitefully determined to destroy everything that God has commanded to live."<sup>41</sup>

In Nibley's view modern-day Mahans abound. In an address given in 1992 at the J. Reuben Clark Law School at BYU, he condemned the United States Government, big oil and mining companies,

and attorneys—including Ernest L. Wilkinson—for applying the Mahan Principle to wrest mineral and oil-rich lands from Native Americans, breaking contracts, violating treaties, sacrificing integrity, and destroying the environment in the process.<sup>42</sup> Nibley had great admiration for Native Americans; he especially loved to visit the Hopi, who lived simple lives free from the plague of materialism. He honored them for clinging to ancient lifestyles and rejecting eco-damaging industry and technology. He praised them for their tenacity in preserving ancient customs, rites, traditions, lands, and religion. He extolled their culture that was "completely religious and therefore completely consistent."<sup>43</sup>

In contrast, he mocked and derided the insensitive, money-groping modern bureaucrats, politicians, industrialists, attorneys, and businessmen whose wealth-driven myopia prevented them from seeing the beauty and significance of these ancient people and their lands. With disgust he derided them for deceitfully exploiting Native Americans and their lands in their pursuit of wealth. He identified them as the wicked latter-day Gentiles whom the resurrected Savior warned as he taught the Lehites,

"Wo . . . unto the unbelieving of the Gentiles . . . [who] have scattered my people . . . and have . . . trodden [them underfoot]. . . . At that day when the Gentiles shall sin against my gospel, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, and *shall be lifted up in the pride of their hearts above all nations, and above all the people of the whole earth*, and shall be filled with all manner of lyings, and of deceits, and of mischiefs, and . . . hypocrisy, and murders, and priestcrafts, and whoredoms, and of secret abominations" (3 Nephi 16:4, 8-10).<sup>44</sup>

Here Nibley interjects, "Note that lying comes first in the list, a judgment that few will dispute today." Then continuing from the Book of Mormon, "If they shall do all those things, and shall reject the fulness of my gospel, . . . I will bring the fulness of my gospel from among them. And then will I remember my covenant which I have made unto my people . . . and I will bring my gospel unto them. . . . The Gentiles shall not have power over you; . . . and ye shall come unto the knowledge of the fulness of my gospel. But if the Gentiles will repent and return unto me, . . . behold, they shall be numbered among my people, O house of Israel. And I will not suffer my people . . . [to] tread them down" (3 Nephi

16:10-14).<sup>45</sup> Nibley observes this is “an ominous note” and then continues,

The promise is repeated in the last speech to the Nephites: “Verily, verily, I say unto you, thus hath the Father commanded me—that I should give unto this people this land for their inheritance” (3 Nephi 16:16). “And it shall come to pass that all lyings, and deceivings, and envyings, and strifes, and priest-crafts, and whoredoms shall be done away. . . . But if they will repent . . . I will establish my church among them, and they shall come in unto the covenant and be numbered among this the remnant of Jacob, unto whom I have given this land for an inheritance; And they shall assist my people, the remnant of Jacob, and also as many of the house of Israel as shall come, that they may build a city, which shall be called the New Jerusalem” (3 Nephi 21:19, 22-24).<sup>46</sup>

As he concluded his remarks to the attorneys gathered at the law school, Nibley observed, “Throughout these explicit prophecies it is the Gentiles who join ‘the Lamanites and those who have

become Lamanites,’ not the other way around. If we are to be saved we must move in their direction.”<sup>47</sup>

Nibley suggested a taxonomy that should inform our pursuits and our environmental decisions in this life. Borrowing from Aristotle, he observed that

there are two kinds of goods which we are after in this life, goods of first intent and goods of second intent. Goods of second intent are good because they help us obtain other things. Thus a pencil, a watch, shoes, a hammer, a stove, etc., are all useful for obtaining something beyond their own value. Goods of first intent, on the other hand, are good in themselves and need no excuse; they are not the means but the goal. Thus millions of people take the plane to Hawaii—the plane is a good of second intent and gets us there; but the delights of the islands are goods of first intent, whose enjoyment needs no explanation or excuse. People crave them for what they are and actually need them more than any of the amenities.”<sup>48</sup>

He felt that goods of first intent fit the purpose of creation revealed to Joseph Smith, “All things which

Nibley praised the Hopi for their tenacity in preserving ancient customs, rites, traditions, lands, and religion. He extolled their culture that was “completely religious and therefore completely consistent.” Hopi buffalo dance at Hano, Arizona.



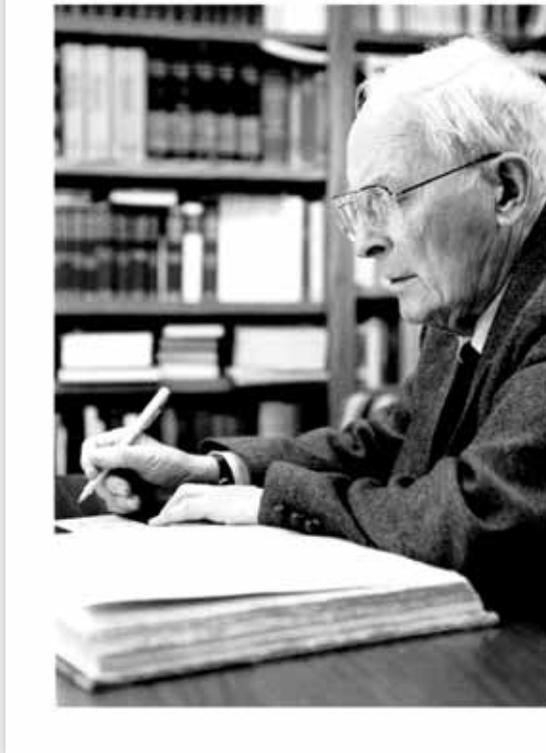
come of the earth . . . are made for the benefit and the use of man, both to please the eye and to gladden the heart, . . . for taste and for smell, to strengthen the body and to enliven the soul' (D&C 59:18-19).<sup>49</sup>

While we may not all agree with Nibley's environmental perspective, we can agree that he was clear about where he stood in regards to humanity's stewardship over creation.

To Aristotle's dichotomy of goods Nibley added a third—goods of third intent. This he defined as “the one and only thing which is not good of itself and not useful of itself but is prized above all else—it is money” and the environment-wrecking practices that pursue it. He identified Geneva Steel and its pollution-belching mill as an example of a third-intent good, as well as the nuclear waste dump in Beatty, Nevada, the slash harvesting of thousand-year-old redwood forests by Pacific Lumber Company, the strip-mining of the sacred Blue Canyon, and the slaughter of whales for soap and shoe polish.<sup>50</sup>

The Doctrine and Covenants expressed well for Nibley the struggle between the pursuit of mammon and our stewardship over the earth. Therein we are told

(1) that “the beasts of the field and the fowls of the air, and that which cometh of the earth, is ordained for the use of man for food and for raiment, and that he might have in abundance” (D&C 49:19). We may take what we need, but (2) “wo be unto man that sheddeth blood or that wasteth flesh and hath no need” (D&C 49:21). We may not take more than we need. (3) Above all, we may not use this substance to exercise control and dominion over each other. “But it is not given that one man should possess that which is above another, wherefore the world lieth in sin” (D&C 49:20). The sweeping indictment against the whole world gets down to fundamentals: “Before the blighting influences of inordinate appetite and love of this world . . . the strength, power, beauty, and glory that once adorned the form and constitution of man have vanished away.” Zion has ever been supplanted by Babylon, which is ever bent on converting the treasures of God's world into the “substance . . . of an idol, which waxeth old and shall perish in Babylon, even Babylon the great, which shall fall” (D&C 1:16); while with Zion the earth is to “be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory” (Tenth Article of Faith).<sup>51</sup>



Hugh Nibley.

Courtesy Perry Collections, Lee Library, Brigham Young University

Nibley invited those who wish to pursue temporal wealth at the expense of environmental health to consider Moroni's ominous warning, “For behold, ye do love money. . . . O ye pollutions, . . . who sell yourselves for that which will canker, why have ye polluted the holy church of God? . . . Why do ye build up your secret abominations to get gain, and cause that widows should mourn before the Lord, and also orphans, . . . and also the blood of their fathers and their husbands to cry unto the Lord . . . for vengeance upon your heads? Behold, the sword of vengeance hangeth over you; and the time soon cometh that he avengeth the blood of the saints upon you, for he will not suffer their cries any longer (Mormon 8:37-41).”<sup>52</sup>

We should not sacrifice environmental health on the altar of temporal wealth.

## Conclusion

While we may not all agree with Nibley's environmental perspective, we can agree that he was clear about where he stood in regards to humanity's stewardship over creation. His passionate reasoning and fervent writings on the topic invite each of us to consider several important questions:

- What does it mean to have dominion over the earth?
- How does God want me to care for creation?
- What is the relationship between spiritual and environmental health?
- How should nature and humanity cooperate?

- Can humanity progress without compromising or destroying natural resources?
- What is the proper balance between financial prosperity and environmental welfare?

I believe that we are indebted to our brother, the good Professor Nibley, not only for raising these important questions, but also for providing his well-reasoned perspectives to inform our contemplations, our conclusions, and our actions. ■



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## NOTES

1. Boyd Petersen, "Truth Is Stranger Than Folklore: Hugh Nibley—The Man and the Legend," *Sunstone*, December 2002, 18–23.
2. Hugh W. Nibley, "Man's Dominion," *New Era*, October 1972, 24–25. Versions of this article also appeared in *New Era*, January–February 1981, 46–53; Hugh W. Nibley, "Man's Dominion, or Subduing the Earth," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1994), 3–22; Hugh W. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth: Man's Dominion," in *Nibley on the Timely and the Timeless*, 2nd ed. (Provo, UT: BYU Religious Studies Center, 2004), 95–110 (quotations are keyed to this version).
3. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 96.
4. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 97–98.
5. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 98.
6. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 98 (Nibley's published works show the original sources for his quotations throughout).
7. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 98–99; see also Hugh W. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 43–44.
8. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 29.
9. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 29.
10. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 50–51.
11. Hugh W. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 55–75.
12. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 55.
13. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 55–56.
14. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 56.
15. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 24.
16. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 56.
17. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 24.
18. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 31.
19. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 31.
20. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 32.
21. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 34.
22. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 99. The *New Era* version of this address (October 1972, 24–25) incorrectly attributes the second half of this quotation to *4 Esdras* 8:47; see also Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 43–44.
23. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 99.
24. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 100. Ben Sirach was a Jew living in Egypt around 180 BC. The *Book of Adam and Eve*, also known as the *Conflict of Adam and Eve*, is a Christian pseudepigraphical work thought to date from the fifth or sixth century AD.
25. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 104.
26. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 100, 101.
27. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 101–2.
28. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 42–43.
29. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 104.
30. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 105.
31. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 32–33.
32. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 38.
33. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 95.
34. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 95–96; Hugh W. Nibley, "Promised Lands," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 99.
35. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 102; see Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 45.
36. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 103.
37. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 58.
38. See Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 59–60.
39. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 57.
40. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 72–74.
41. Nibley, "Subduing the Earth," 104–5.
42. Nibley, "Promised Lands," 76–101.
43. Nibley, "Promised Lands," 76–101.
44. Nibley, "Promised Lands," 99–100.
45. Nibley, "Promised Lands," 100.
46. Nibley, "Promised Lands," 100.
47. Nibley, "Promised Lands," 100–101.
48. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 64.
49. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 64.
50. See Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 64–66.
51. Nibley, "Brigham Young on the Environment," 46.
52. Nibley, "Stewardship of the Air," 71.