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Zion Building: Writing about It and Doing It

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Reviewed by T. Allen Lambert

Zion Building:
Writing about It and Doing It

How to review this book? On the one hand, I am myself a zealot for Zion and a friend of both authors and would therefore want to acclaim such an oeuvre; on the other hand, my critical analysis arouses disappointment. This is a curious book, in part because it embodies an ambitious approach to what is nominally a modest goal, thereby conjuring up in my mind an image of a "whopper burger" that incorporates everything in the kitchen into one serving.

What could be more enticing than building on Nibley's Approaching Zion (as the authors assert and as Nibley himself implies in his foreword, p. ix)?1 What feast might we expect in nearly 500 pages devoted to "Principles of the United Order for the Modern World"? Indeed, what greater goal than to "seek to bring forth and establish the cause of Zion" (D&C 6:6) through more fully implementing our temple covenants of consecration and stewardship? But as both scholars and practitioners, we must explore the degree to which achievement approaches aspiration.

While pursuing the relatively modest objective of illustrating various principles and practices which they consider more Zion-like in and for modern economic activities and affairs, the authors wander through lengthy stage-setting;2 world history;3 contem-

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1 Hugh W. Nibley, Approaching Zion (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1989).
porary conditions of productivity and labor;⁴ some principles of
the united order and practices for individuals, families, other
groups and nations, and church;⁵ and management consulting.⁶
Finally, the book closes with 12 pages of appendixes, 65 pages of
notes, a 29-page bibliography, and an index.

I

The main message and principal contribution of the book are
found in the second half, beginning with chapter 10. The first
half of the book, which has little relevance to the theme, will be
considered afterward.

Appendix B is a useful and lengthy (but not exhaustive) list of
LDS and non-LDS “charitable organizations” that are engaged
in one or another form of aid to peoples in distress around the
world (poor, oppressed, diseased, etc.). Addresses, phone numbers,
and brief descriptions are included for those who may be inter-
ested in enhancing or contributing to those particular efforts.
These include a wide range of activities for providing clothing,
food, equipment, medical and dental care, agricultural, educa-
tional, organizational, financial, self-help, and other economic
development consulting and assistance. A second edition of the
book might modernize this list by including E-mail addresses and
websites. And the authors, or the BYU Marriott School of Man-
agement, might consider setting up a website to list all these and
additional charitable organizations—as well as accumulating ex-
amples of successes and failures so that others could learn about
and from them and adapt elements to their own circumstances.

Also useful are parts of chapters 12 through 14, which offer
suggestions and examples of how individuals do and can contrib-
ute more to Zion-building in the world through church service,
personal initiatives, group involvements, institution formation

³ “From Adam’s Fall to Adam Smith” and “The Industrial Revolution and
the United Order.”
⁴ “Wealth and Poverty,” “Ownership, Management, and Labor,” “Fi-
nance,” and “Capitalism, Socialism, and the United Order in the Modern World.”
⁵ “Celestial Inheritance,” “Upright Citizens in an Ideal Society,” and
“More Nations Than One.”
⁶ “The Talent of Men of Business,” “Stewardship Management in Modern
Business,” “True Energetic Life-giving Principle,” and “Cooperatives.”
(e.g., producer, consumer, and credit cooperatives), at home or abroad. Short summaries of numerous types of efforts from around the world are offered by indicating possibilities and inspiring additional involvement as well as new ideas and approaches for specific situations. These range from being an enterprise mentor, to engineering assistance, to short visits by volunteer medical teams, to family vacations in communities in need of any kind of help you may be able to offer, to literacy training, to enhancing cultural understanding, to soil conservation and water management, to marketing experience, and to anything you can imagine of value to the health and well-being of God's children.7

Chapter 17 emphasizes cooperatives and worker/employee ownership, with illustrations ranging from Israeli kibbutzim to Moroni Feed in Utah, with some European retailers in between. A brief review and reminder of the roots of Latter-day Saint cooperatives begun in the nineteenth century follows.

Chapter 19 provides the most elaborate description of the development and operation of a more Christian form of modern economic organization. This story of the Mondragon cooperatives among the Basques of northern Spain has sufficient detail and relevance to be especially worthy of study, analysis, and emulation in certain settings.8

Less clearly useful are a few inadequately detailed examples of corporate contributions and outreach identified in chapter 15. Being familiar with more of the story of some of these than is offered in the book, I wonder about their portrayal and whether the authors are not sometimes stretching to find more goodness and hope than reality warrants. In 12 places the book sings the praises of a certain Latter-day Saint former CEO of a major U.S. manufacturer to the point that it begins to sound like pandering or paid promotion, especially when alleged moral motivation is not established but speculated about ("may," "perhaps," "could be"). Suffice it to say that most of the corporate cases involve compet-

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7 This presupposes, of course, that you actually have something better to offer and that you will do no harm. I mention this as a reminder that development efforts and well-meaning interventions often do more harm than good.

8 The authors need to update their references on Mondragon, including the second edition of W. F. Whyte's book (only the first edition appears in the bibliography).
ing descriptions and interpretations. Superficial allusions to alleged (but uncertain) good deeds can lead to myth-making and ultimately to cynicism.

Chapter 10 provides a simple summary of some of “The Principles of the United Order,” presumably providing a filter for examples and material in other chapters. Topics include care of the poor, work and self-reliance, equality, consecration, stewardship, storehouse, and moral motivation. Some discussion is also offered on whether the nineteenth-century LDS united order was a failure and what its future might be. None of this is elaborated, and alternative formulations are not considered. For example, the absence of justice both as a principle as well as a general discussion stands out. And let me point to Gordon Thomasson’s argument that many individual united orders did not “fail,” but rather were sold and privatized in order to escape federal government confiscation/expropriation.9

I do not know quite what to make of chapter 18 with its grandiose concept of “united order principles inspired enterprises” (“UOPIEs”) as the “True Energetic Life-giving Principle.” The concept and label might aspire to theoretic substance and analytic utility, but I did not find a well-developed idea or application in such subheadings as “Stewardship and Equality—Cults and Accounting” (p. 302) and “Stewardship, Self-reliance, and Alienation” (p. 304). And under “Morality and Enterprise” we get treated to the platitude “In the end it is human motivation that makes an economy operate” (p. 308) and to the following amazing statement: “It can be fairly argued that much of Nevada’s prosperity in recent years can be attributed to the adoption of a Utah-like family orientation to its economy, and the influence of its large LDS communities” (p. 308). Aside from not being argued or explained, this assertion gives me great pause. Nevada’s prosperity depends primarily on (family-oriented?) gambling, which is mostly an offspring of organized crime and non-Mormon corporate greed in a degrading form of exploitation of human weakness. Do Mormons want to take credit for that evil enterprise, and do Lucas and Woodworth really mean to hold that

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9 Personal communication from Gordon Thomasson.
up as an “ensign” to Zion-building? Would not this be another appropriate place to consider the concept of justice?\footnote{For an interesting and relevant application of Rawls’s theory of justice to Mormon irrigation, see Arthur Maass and Raymond L. Anderson, “. . . And the Desert Shall Rejoice: Conflict, Growth, and Justice in Arid Environments (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT, 1978). See John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971).}

Is this what they mean by “LDS Corporate Cultures” in chapter 16? While it is hard to disagree with such ideas as “fair pay,” “valuing human resources,” “employee dignity,” “family-friendly policies,” and “industrial democracy,” they were not developed by corporations led by Latter-day Saints and are not especially common in modern Mormon economy. And some of the facts of supposed LDS businesses are incorrect. For example, Novell did not “evolve slowly” but grew faster and became bigger than WordPerfect, and unfortunately neither of them is now predominantly LDS-owned or managed. We might ask how the authors would apply their “moral conduct of business” to a case in which we postulate an LDS vice-president of a candy company is to obtain sugar and chocolate at the lowest possible prices, thereby contributing to the exploitation of low-paid third-world workers. Or how might they apply their principles to a government case wherein we postulate that the official role of an LDS personnel manager of the CIA requires recruitment of people to lie, cheat, steal, and murder “for reasons of state”?

Chapter 20 poses a fundamental and vitally important question: “Could an economy or economic sector which was based on the principles of the united order be made to work in the modern world?” (p. 328). But no real answer is entertained. Nor does critical analysis of whether we ought to try to apply united order principles within or to the modern world economy occur. However, the authors do assume the centrality of financial capital in the modern economy and suggest an alternative banking system in the form of a “storehouse treasury” that is essentially communally owned and governed, and they explore how such might operate and be managed in a manner more consistent with principles of consecration and stewardship.

The final chapter meanders through ideas about “Zion and the New Millennium” but without any clear goal or conclusion.
References to alleged benefits of NAFTA (about which controversies are ignored), to, ironically, Andrew Carnegie as “one of the great heroes of the free enterprise system” (despite his mistreatment of labor), to Friedrich Hayek, Karl Marx, and Beatrice Webb; to many others; and to socialism, capitalism, and Zionism are given—all without my grasping a clear purpose or theme.

II

Because Working toward Zion promotes Zion-building and does so with practical examples for here and now, I recommend that Mormons peruse the second half for inspiration and ideas. But they should be wary, especially of the first half, for it presents barriers to getting to the meat. Chapters 1–9 were, for me, an obstacle, both because the length and irrelevance got in the way and because there was so much that I found annoying and (implicitly) contentious.

The 29-page bibliography is both excessive and incomplete, and it seems indiscriminate. It looks much like it includes almost every printed page the authors ever glanced at (with a few notable exceptions). Selectivity would have been helpful to those readers who are unfamiliar with the debates and who might be seeking guidance for additional sources. Also helpful in a second edition would be an annotated bibliography. Scholars may find much dross and some significant lacunae.

For example, Hyrum L. Andrus’s Doctrines of the Kingdom (Bookcraft, 1973) is missing, despite its being the most systematically developed theology and presentation of principles of Mormon economics; no serious discussion of the matter should ignore this book. How could the authors omit the official 1939 Melchizedek Priesthood Study Course: Priesthood and Church Welfare, issued in hardback by the First Presidency and Quorum of the Twelve? Or the MIA General Board’s 1935–36 Senior Manual, The Community High-Road to Better Things? Or the 1886 Logan Temple Lectures on “Political Economy” by Presiding Bishop Charles Nibley? Or B. H. Roberts’s “Economics of the New Age” and “The Doctrine of Consecration and Stewardship in the Light of the Modern World’s Economic and Industrial Breakdown” in Last Seven Discourses (Deseret Book, 1948)? How
about Dale Mouritsen, *A Defense and a Refuge: Priesthood Correlation and the Establishment of Zion* (BYU, 1972); William Dyer, *Catching the Vision: Working Together to Create a Millennial Ward* (Bookcraft, 1993); Genevieve De Hoyos, *Stewardship—The Divine Order* (Horizon, 1982); Alma Burton, *Toward the New Jerusalem* (Deseret Book, 1985)? Should Ogden Kraut, *The United Order* (Pioneer Press, 1983) be ignored? No reference is made to Ruth and Reginald Wright Kauffman’s *The Latter Day Saints: A Study of Mormons in the Light of Economic Conditions* (1912; reprint, University of Illinois Press, 1994), especially in discussing the larger political economic context of the failure of united orders in Utah. And, while Gordon Wagner’s paper given at the 1990 “Plotting Zion” conference is listed (but without including any of his principles and models of success), papers given by others at that conference are omitted. These include Orson Scott Card’s “Living in Zion” and items by Gordon Thomasson and myself (copies of which were in the possession of the authors).11

This leads one to question Lucas and Woodworth’s notes, which are lengthy but sometimes of questionable relevance, accuracy, worth, or completeness. For example, even though they refer to Gordon Wagner’s exceptional work in Africa, they do not provide details of any of his successes as examples or models alongside others they describe. And while they also list Wagner’s Cornell Ph.D. dissertation in economics,12 they do not actually discuss this very important work in any of the relevant places in

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11 Here are just a few examples of more than a dozen relevant papers and presentations over the past twenty years which they ignore: Gordon C. Thomasson, “Zion as a Refuge and the Refugee in Zion” and “Unique Potential Strengths, Roles, and Contributions of the Contemporary Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints to Development in Poor Nations and Communities.” T. Allen Lambert: “Consecration and Stewardship: Concepts, Principles, Institutions”; “Preparedness for and Principles of Zion-building”; “Philosophy and Planning for Relief and Development by the Mormon Church”; “Capitalism vs. Christianity: A Critique and Counter-Proposal.” Also our joint effort: T. Allen Lambert, Gordon C. Thomasson, and Gordon E. Wagner, “Mormon Economics: A Socially Efficient System of Justice.” (These and others are available through this reviewer.)

their book. And in their longest note (chap. 7, n. 20), in which they discuss issues of organization, leadership, and management, no reference is made to the most systematic treatment of those issues in this context. These omissions are curious, given numerous interactions, exchanges of papers, and my critiques of Lucas's ideas at various Sunstone symposia.

But more critical are some of the problems with the first nine chapters of the book, which are designed to set the stage by discussing such topics as world population, condition, and history; the modern economy; the rise of states and bureaucracy; the emergence of capitalism from feudalism; stories of individuals; Adam Smith's views; Andrew Carnegie's entrepreneurial success; equality; Marxism; socialism; Social Darwinism; the wonders of industrial production; the changing nature of work; the restoration; stewardship; and numerous other topics (as well as endless name-dropping). But the quantity and quality of this discussion tends to get in the way of the main message found in the second half of the book; I fear that many readers may simply not get through the first half and so will not benefit from the useful information. As one fairly familiar with the material covered in those chapters, I failed to get a good sense of relevance and judicious selection. And I became quite dissatisfied with some of the underlying assumptions and attitudes. Of course, that is my problem, but I may not be alone. Furthermore, it distracted me from greater appreciation of the good material.

For example, I found it gratuitous and wrong-headed to seemingly worship Adam Smith and repeatedly link him to Joseph Smith as if they were of the same mind and teaching. On several occasions the book confronts the reader with unsupported or false comparisons similar to: "Joseph Smith, like Adam Smith, . . ." (p. 131). And consider pages 14 and 15 with likenesses of the two Smiths facing one another as if in mutual admiration or approval (the only place in the book with such a juxtaposition). The book

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devotes more words to Adam Smith than any other person and treats him as some kind of True Prophet from beginning to end. At one point the book gushes, “This is the ideal of Adam Smith, a man whose name so curiously combines the names of two of the mightiest men of God” (p. 100).

The authors’ representation of Adam Smith is highly selective and misleading. For example, they omit any reference to Smith’s important “Essay on the Colonies,” in which he points out evils in the operation of so-called free market economy, as well as to his other illustrations of the undesirable social consequences of the system promoted by Lucas and Woodworth. Also, their focus on the free market was a very minor aspect of Smith’s Wealth of Nations and does not really correspond closely to what is called a free market today. Smith’s main theory had to do with the productive benefits of specialization; the division of labor; and other aspects of social organization; the labor theory of the value, role, and use of money; and other concepts.

If they sanctify Smith, they also demonize Karl Marx with such ad hominem comments as “this dour, unpleasant man” (p. 127) with “a darker vision” (p. 90) and refer to “his only friend” (poor, demented man, n’est-ce pas?), Friedrich Engels, as a “limousine liberal” (p. 90). Such language does not lend credence to serious analysis; rather, it resembles partisan political rhetoric.

In general, their review of history leaves much to be desired and contributes little, if anything, to the book; such is also my reaction to too much of their portrayal of our modern economy and society. Too much wind, distortion, and irrelevance are found in this book.

Curiously, Lucas and Woodworth avoid using the term capitalism most of the time, preferring such phrases as free enterprise, free market economy, industrial economy, and variants. Why this particular delicacy? It was not, contrary to the authors, “industrial economy” that Marx and others criticized, but capitalism as a specific political economic mode of organizing production, labor, trade/exchange, and distribution of benefits. Their failure to understand and properly use technical terms weakens their effort and argument. Capitalism consists of a system of social institutions involving certain arrangements of laws, labor, money, banking,
taxation, property, management, socialization of risk and cost together with privatization of profit, state protection, and independence of religion and church control. (Capitalism could only develop independently of church influence because it needed freedom from institutional and scriptural moral and legal restrictions on usury, etc.) Despite popular ideology, capitalism is neither reducible nor equivalent to free enterprise or free markets; freedom of exchange is not unique to modern capitalism. While this is not the place to characterize capitalism, it is important to point out that Lucas and Woodworth distort the argument by their particular use of labels and names, and selective attention to historical events, processes, mechanisms, and views. Such practice permits inadequately supported conclusions such as: “one can reconcile the united order principles of equality and individual property in the context of the modern industrial economy” (p. 116). Again, while this and other of their hypotheses-cum-truth can be challenged by considerable evidence and theoretical analysis, this is not the place to do so.

However, this lack of conceptual clarity helps explain the weakness of their analysis of united order principles and how they are unique, particularly in solving what is for many a dilemma: the problem of markets and equality. As Wagner, Thomasson, and I have argued (in papers noted above), it is possible to separate market operation in determining demand and price for common consumables from valuing fundamental (and essentially non-renewable or use-rate limited) resources like soil, air, water, and oil, in which cost to future generations cannot be fairly reflected in current pricing based on production costs. Furthermore, stewardships can be disaggregated into consumption and production so that all may have a common standard of living (equality in consumption stewardship based on grace) but great differences in productive responsibility (inequality in production stewardships based on talent and performance); likewise production stewardships may be separated from distribution of profits/surplus, especially if the community owns and allocates capital through, for example, a bishop’s storehouse or treasury (community owned and operated banking system). Finally, such personal property as clothing, furniture, books, tools, and transportation may be treated differently from land and other common resources for which one
may be assigned either consumption or production stewardship but not ownership with the ability to privately sell/exchange title.

In some ways the debate over the nature of and relationships between consecration and stewardship, the united order, capitalism, and the modern economy is much like that of Book of Mormon geography: although numerous "mappings" are proposed, very few are plausible. What makes the economic debate more difficult is that the differences in economic systems lie in their ideological nature, contemporary consequences, and real demand on current behavior. Beliefs about Book of Mormon geography do not entail substantial sacrifices, either intellectual or material, but ideas about consecration and stewardship, income equality, capitalism, and so forth, do have real consequences.

In sum, I think that Working toward Zion contributes to an increased understanding of the possibilities for better participation by aspiring Saints in living more aspects of the laws of consecration and stewardship here and now. But I am not persuaded by Lucas and Woodworth's attempt to demonstrate the relevance and influence of consecration and stewardship to the modern economy (transnational corporate capitalism). While the book provides useful instruction on how to do better, I worry that it may not inspire as many to do so as the authors, myself, and other Zion-seekers would hope. It too often comes across as an apologia for the system that Hugh Nibley has so eloquently criticized. Perhaps another revised and more concise edition could be produced in paperback in order to communicate with a larger audience of those waiting for Zion.