



4-1-2005

Hugh Nibley's Articles of Faith

John W. Welch

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq>



Part of the [Mormon Studies Commons](#), and the [Religious Education Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Welch, John W. (2005) "Hugh Nibley's Articles of Faith," *BYU Studies Quarterly*. Vol. 44 : Iss. 2 , Article 4.
Available at: <https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/byusq/vol44/iss2/4>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at BYU ScholarsArchive. It has been accepted for inclusion in *BYU Studies Quarterly* by an authorized editor of BYU ScholarsArchive. For more information, please contact ellen_amatangelo@byu.edu.

In Memoriam

Hugh Nibley's Articles of Faith

John W. Welch

So, Hugh Nibley has two lawyers speaking at his funeral. Good thing he appreciated irony! I have laughed and wept as I have written *this* final examination.

Speaking on behalf of all who have taken a Nibley class, attended a Nibley fireside, source-checked a footnote, or have been changed by reading his gifted prose, I say, simply, thank you, Hugh, with special mention also to Phyllis.

If we were to "render all the thanks and praise that our whole souls have power to possess" (Mosiah 2:20), yet would our thanks be inadequate. He was a true friend, a model mentor, generous and inspirational in the extreme. He never did anything part way.

To paraphrase Brigham Young, I feel like shouting hallelujah all the time when I think that I was so fortunate to ever know Hugh Nibley.

Robert K. Thomas once said, "Few students can talk coherently about their first class from Brother Nibley."¹ That was the case for me when I entered his honors Book of Mormon class as a freshman forty years ago, or thirty-six years ago when I had my first three-hour, one-on-one session with him. And it is still the case today. Who can speak coherently of the life-changing experience of encountering Nibley's expansive curiosity and grasp of everything from "before Adam"² to the continuous "break-throughs" he always hoped to see?³

Lots of words are used to describe Hugh Nibley: brilliant, eclectic, iconoclast, critic, genius. But what was it, I got wondering, that held it all together for Hugh? What were Hugh Nibley's "articles of faith"? In the middle of the night, two days after his passing, it suddenly dawned on me what his articles of faith were. And as my mind ran through the colorful

titles of his many books and publications, through which most people will have access to him, the following thirteen-point insight fell into place:

First, Hugh believed in God, the Eternal Father, and in his Son, Jesus Christ, and in the Holy Ghost (A of F 1). He rejected Augustine's speculative creation of trinitarian theology, commenting wryly, "Here certainly is a place where revelation would [have been] helpful."⁴

Second, Hugh believed that we will be accountable for our own sins and not for Adam's transgressions (A of F 2). He saw to the depths of the plan of salvation and wrestled to the ground the "terrible questions"⁵ of where we came from, why we are here, and where we are going. He reenthroned human agency through the ancient "doctrine of the two ways"⁶ and the primordial dichotomy of good and evil.⁷

He zealously claimed the privilege of worshipping Almighty God according to the dictates of conscience (A of F 11). He spoke out against intolerance or judging others. He wanted you "to understand men and women as *they* are, and not . . . as *you* are."⁸ Tolerance, he wrote, is a crucial ingredient in "exemplary manhood."⁹

He also spoke keenly on political topics, realizing the necessity of being subject to kings, rulers, and magistrates (A of F 12), yet hoping that people in power would not seek for glory or to get gain,¹⁰ and that we would have "leaders," not "managers."¹¹ He wrote of being "in the party but not of the party,"¹² on statecraft, ancient and modern,¹³ on "the uses and abuses of patriotism,"¹⁴ and much about the problems of war¹⁵ and the ideals of peace.¹⁶

Hugh Nibley's first principle was clearly faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (A of F 4). Hugh believed that, through the Atonement of Jesus Christ, all mankind shall be resurrected (A of F 3). At Don Decker's funeral, Hugh declared: "A physical resurrection does exist. We believe in it. We will need it. We came here to get a body for a definite purpose. The body plays a definite role in the mind and the spirit."¹⁷ Hugh testified that Jesus Christ "paid the ransom price, he redeemed us when we could not redeem ourselves."¹⁸ It was, he said, "a suffering of which we cannot conceive, but



Hugh Nibley was often seen in this posture, poring over a book or document.

which is perfectly believable."¹⁹ We are saved by grace after all we can do, or as he unforgettably said, "Work we must, but the lunch is free."²⁰

He spoke extensively of obedience to the ordinances of the gospel (A of F 3). In "How Firm a Foundation,"²¹ what made it so was the priesthood, ordinances performed by those in authority (A of F 5), which extend the gospel beyond this "ignorant present."²² The ordinances are everything behind his books *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri*²³ and *Temple and Cosmos*.²⁴ The ordinances have allowed him and will allow us to pass into the spirit world, out of the reach of the power of Satan.

Of the first principles of the gospel (A of F 4), Hugh said, "We must keep our eye on the principles of the gospel that have been given us."²⁵ Of repentance, he spoke of perpetual, voluntary repentance as the very definition of righteousness.²⁶ He exemplified humility and unpretentiousness.

He wrote passionately about the nature of spiritual gifts (A of F 7), and exhorted us to "deny not the gifts of God."²⁷ He clearly had the gift of tongues. From his own thin-veil experiences, he knew of and defended trenchantly the realities of the visions of Joseph Smith.²⁸ He rejoiced in the gift of prophecy.²⁹ He truly believed and unfolded all that God has revealed, from "Enoch the prophet"³⁰ and "Abraham in Egypt"³¹ to the instructions revealed during Christ's forty-day ministry.³²

Eagerly he believed all that God does now reveal, and shall yet reveal (A of F 9). He drove a wedge between the sophic world and the prophets.³³ He wrote incisively against "criticizing the Brethren,"³⁴ ending that presentation with a story of Elder Spencer W. Kimball wiping off Hugh's dusty shoes, and with the testimony, "I truly believe they are chosen servants of God."³⁵

Because Hugh had a command of primary sources, a major segment of his widely published work successfully compares the organization that existed in the Primitive Church with features of the Restored Church (A of F 6), covering such subjects as Apostles and bishops,³⁶ prayer circles,³⁷ baptism for the dead in ancient times,³⁸ and when and why "the lights went out."³⁹

Without doubt, he believed the Bible to be the word of God as far as it is translated correctly⁴⁰ (A of F 8). Without correct translation we have only "zeal without knowledge."⁴¹ Nibley taught us to read the Greek New Testament with our LDS eyes wide open. According to the King James Version, John 17:11, in the great high priestly prayer, simply reads, "Holy Father, keep through thine own name those whom thou hast given me"; but to Hugh Nibley, who rightly sees this as a temple text, it is better translated instrumentally, "Holy Father, test them on the name with which you

endowed me,"⁴² a much different reading, for those who wish to enter into the presence of God.

It goes without saying that he believed the Book of Mormon to be the word of God. We could multiply dozens of titles, from *Lehi in the Desert*⁴³ to his last retrospective "Forty Years After."⁴⁴ He has consistently taught us to look at this book more carefully, that it holds up under the closest scrutiny as an ancient testament of Jesus Christ, with deep spiritual relevance today and at the judgment bar of God.

No theme was stronger for Hugh Nibley than our "approaching Zion," which is the thrust of the tenth Article of Faith. When invited to speak in a Last Lecture Series at BYU in 1971, without hesitation he took Article of Faith 10 as his ultimate topic in the lecture he challengingly entitled "Our Glory or Our Condemnation."⁴⁵ He wrote often about the millennial goals of a consecrated Zion,⁴⁶ if only from "a distant view."⁴⁷ He saw Zion as needing to be perfectly pure in a perfectly pure environment, to be holy enough to receive the coming Lord himself, "for the Lord hath chosen Zion; he hath desired it for his habitation" (Ps. 132:13).

In the tenth Article of Faith is located Nibley's concern about the renewal of the earth to its paradisiacal glory, of "man's dominion,"⁴⁸ our "stewardship of the air"⁴⁹ and the obligations that accompany all "promised lands."⁵⁰

In "Goods of First and Second Intent,"⁵¹ he spoke of seeking after things that are ends in themselves, things that are honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and so forth (A of F 13). Throughout his life he was occupied with this quest, in an effort to educate the Saints,⁵² from college students down to the most humble amateurs.⁵³ On the phrase "in doing good to all men," this is precisely what his speech "How to Get Rich"⁵⁴ is all about. And how do we get rich? By giving it all away, in doing good to all men. And, for Nibley, these were not just words.

Thus, several new conclusions dawned on me as I suddenly appreciated more fully than ever before Hugh Nibley's brilliance as the quintessential gospel-scholar. As eccentric as he was in some ways, Hugh Nibley swam in the main streams of Mormonism. It is hard to find the title of a single Nibley book or article that does not pertain directly to one of the Articles of Faith.

In extraordinary ways, he addressed ordinary topics.

His subtexts were none other than the primary truths of the Articles of Faith, all thirteen of them.

His framework was completely congruent with Joseph Smith's.

He did not ride any particular pet hobby horses, but sought to circumscribe all truth into "one eternal round."⁵⁵

He preached the gospel, in its fullness, and with an eye single to the glory of God.

Nibley was loved and trusted precisely because he put first principles first.

At his sixty-fifth birthday celebration, it was said, "A great scholar . . . is *not* one who depends simply on an infinite memory, but also on an infinite . . . power of combination; bringing together from the four winds, like the Angel of the Resurrection, what else were dust from dead men's bones, into the unity of breathing life."⁵⁶

We will be everlastingly grateful to Hugh Nibley for bringing it all together, for taking dusty books and forgotten scrolls, and breathing into and out of their words the eternal truths of the restored gospel of Jesus Christ. For all this, and much, much more, thank you, Hugh.

In his memory, let us live our religion. We have a work to do to prepare for that exalted sphere where Hugh now moves, and talks, and expounds with endless joy. I testify that the gospel of Jesus Christ is true, that *we shall* have life, and have it abundantly.

Hugh W. Nibley was a frequent contributor of valuable articles to *BYU Studies*. The full text of over a dozen of his titles can be found on the web at byustudies.byu.edu.

John W. Welch is the Editor-in-Chief of *BYU Studies*, the Robert K. Thomas Professor of Law at Brigham Young University, and founder of the Foundation for Ancient Research and Mormon Studies (FARMS). This speech was delivered at Hugh Nibley's funeral on March 2, 2005.

1. Robert K. Thomas, "The Influence of Hugh Nibley: His Presence in the University," in *By Study and Also by Faith*, ed. John M. Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1990), 1:4.

2. "Before Adam," in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, vol. 1 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1986), 49.

3. "Breakthroughs I Would Like to See," in *Approaching Zion*, vol. 9 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989), 378.

4. *The World and the Prophets*, vol. 3 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1987), 95.

5. "The Terrible Questions," in *Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present*, vol. 12 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), 336-78.

6. "The Ancient Law of Liberty," in *World and the Prophets*, 182–90. The doctrine of the "two ways" is discussed frequently, for example, in *Approaching Zion*, 18–19, 30–31, 41, 126, 434, 448, and in *An Approach to the Book of Mormon*, vol. 6 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988), 204.

7. On the premortal world and its conditions, see "Treasures in the Heavens," in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, 171–214.

8. *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, vol. 13 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1994), 150, quoting Brigham Young.

9. "Exemplary Manhood," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 518–19. See also "Patriarchy and Matriarchy," in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, 87–114.

10. See, for example, "The Way of the Wicked," in *Approach to the Book of Mormon*, 378–98.

11. "Leaders to Managers: The Fatal Shift," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 491.

12. "In the Party but Not of the Party," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 105.

13. *The Ancient State: The Rulers and the Ruled*, vol. 10 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1991); *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 138.

14. "The Uses and Abuses of Patriotism," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 247.

15. In *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, see "Renounce War, or a Substitute for Victory," 267–69, "If There Must Needs Be Offense," 270–77, and "Warfare and the Book of Mormon," 278–300.

16. In *Approaching Zion*, see "Our Glory or Our Condemnation," 13, and "The Utopians," 487–523.

17. "Funeral Address," in *Approaching Zion*, 304.

18. "Deny Not the Gifts of God," in *Approaching Zion*, 137.

19. "The Meaning of the Atonement," in *Approaching Zion*, 598.

20. "Work We Must, but the Lunch Is Free," in *Approaching Zion*, 202.

21. "How Firm a Foundation! What Makes It So," in *Approaching Zion*, 149.

22. See "The Expanding Gospel," in *Temple and Cosmos*, 177–211.

23. *The Message of the Joseph Smith Papyri: An Egyptian Endowment* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1975).

24. In *Temple and Cosmos*, see especially "The Meaning of the Temple," 1–41, "Return to the Temple," 42–90, "Sacred Vestments," 91–138, and "The Circle and the Square," 139–73.

25. "Three Degrees of Righteousness," in *Approaching Zion*, 336.

26. See *Approaching Zion*, 301–2, 387, 415, 586–87.

27. "Deny Not the Gifts of God," in *Approaching Zion*, 118.

28. *Tinkling Cymbals and Sounding Brass: The Art of Telling Tales about Joseph Smith and Brigham Young*, vol. 11 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1991).

29. See chapters throughout *World and the Prophets*.

30. *Enoch the Prophet*, vol. 2 of The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1986).

31. *Abraham in Egypt*, vol. 14 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2000).
32. "Evangelium Quadraginta Dierum: The Forty-day Mission of Christ—The Forgotten Heritage," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1987), 10.
33. "Three Shrines: Mantic, Sophic, and Sophistic," in *Ancient State*, 311–79; *World and the Prophets*, 17–79.
34. "Criticizing the Brethren," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 407.
35. *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 444.
36. *Apostles and Bishops in Early Christianity*, vol. 15 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 2005).
37. "The Early Christian Prayer Circle," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 45.
38. "Baptism for the Dead in Ancient Times," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 100.
39. "The Passing of the Primitive Church," in *Mormonism and Early Christianity*, 168.
40. See several of the chapters in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, for example "Historicity of the Bible," 1–20, "Myths and the Scriptures," 37–48, and "Great Are the Words of Isaiah," 215–38.
41. "Zeal without Knowledge," in *Approaching Zion*, 63.
42. "The Meaning of the Atonement," in *Approaching Zion*, 606.
43. *Lehi in the Desert; The World of the Jaredites; There Were Jaredites*, vol. 5 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988); *Approach to the Book of Mormon; Since Cumorah*, vol. 7 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1988); and *The Prophetic Book of Mormon*, vol. 8 of *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, Utah: FARMS, 1989). Nibley saw several aspects of the Dead Sea Scrolls as evidence of the truthfulness of the Bible and the Book of Mormon; see articles in *Old Testament and Related Studies*, including "Unrolling the Scrolls—Some Forgotten Witnesses," 115–70, "More Voices from the Dust," 239–44, and "Qumran and the Companions of the Cave: The Haunted Wilderness," 253–84.
44. "The Book of Mormon: Forty Years After," in *Prophetic Book of Mormon*, 533.
45. "Our Glory or Our Condemnation," in *Approaching Zion*, 1.
46. "Law of Consecration," in *Approaching Zion*, 422.
47. "What Is Zion? A Distant View," in *Approaching Zion*, 25–59.
48. "Man's Dominion, or Subduing the Earth," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 3.
49. "Stewardship of the Air," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 55.
50. "Promised Lands," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 76.
51. "Goods of First and Second Intent," in *Approaching Zion*, 524.
52. "Educating the Saints," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 306.
53. "The Day of the Amateur," in *Brother Brigham Challenges the Saints*, 301.
54. "How to Get Rich," in *Approaching Zion*, 178.
55. See "One Eternal Round: The Hermetic Version," in *Temple and Cosmos*, 379–433, and also the forthcoming volume in the *Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* that will be similarly titled.
56. Thomas, "Influence of Hugh Nibley," 5, citing Thomas DeQuincey, emphasis added.

One of my priorities as document editor for *BYU Studies* is publishing documents by and about lesser-known Latter-day Saints, especially women. Only documents judged to have lasting historical significance are featured in *BYU Studies*, so the challenge is to discover rich, unpublished sources that allow readers to hear otherwise silent historical voices. Sally Bradford Parker's letter to her brother-in-law John Kempton on August 26, 1838, fills the role perfectly. I learned about the letter from Brenda McConkie, a relative of Sally Parker, who showed me a transcript of it while we were on a tour of LDS history sites in Ohio. Steve Sorenson at the LDS Church Archives brought Sally Parker's letters to Janiece Johnson's attention. Her research and writing on early LDS women made her the right choice to work with these letters and to write an introduction for the one featured here.

Sally's letter is published with the permission of the Delaware County Historical Society, where the original reposes safely in the Doris Whittier Pierce File in Delaware, Ohio, near Columbus. Pierce donated this and other family letters to the Historical Society, where family historian W. Edward Kempton painstakingly transcribed them. Kempton's transcription and genealogical research underpin this edition of Sally's letter. The letter is also available through the LDS Family History Library.

This document is more challenging to present than most of those *BYU Studies* has featured. As Kempton wrote to Brenda McConkie on October 15, 1997, Sally is a "powerful and moving writer," but her literacy, like Joseph Smith's, was limited. Her lack of capitalization, punctuation, standardized spelling and appropriate verb tenses is not much poorer than that of some undergraduates, but it makes deciphering her vocabulary and syntax difficult. Document editors today believe that the anthropology of a document—its humanness—is historically significant. We want to mediate only minimally between the author and the reader, the way a museum curator might present an artifact. But we also seek to provide access to the meanings of the document captured in the words. How does one capture the power and beauty of Sally's prose in modern language without damaging it and marring her in the process?

We decided to bring readers into the document editing process by featuring the text twice. The original transcription leaves usage, spelling, capitalization, and punctuation as Sally rendered it. Editorial insertions in brackets [like this] are minimal. Inserts <like this> show words Sally inserted. Strikeouts ~~like this~~ show words Sally struck out. The edited transcription strives to maintain the integrity of Sally's intent while increasing readability. Her verbs remain but tenses have been changed and punctuation, capitalization, and spelling have been standardized.

—Steven C. Harper, *BYU Studies*