

## Chapter 7

# Taking Himself Lightly: The Wit of Hugh Nibley

One day in the early 1950s, Hugh Nibley's teaching assistant Curtis Wright found Hugh leaning over his desk, reading from the Book of Mormon, and laughing. Wright asked Hugh Nibley what was so funny, and Hugh responded that he had discovered an error in the Book of Mormon.

"You did, huh?" Wright asked. "That's interesting. Let me see it."

Hugh handed the scriptures over to Wright and pointed to Alma 42:10, which says that humans are "carnal, sensual, and devilish, by nature." Wright read the passage and demanded, "Well, what's the matter with that?" Having taken classes from several BYU professors who had a very secular approach, Wright was beginning to think that Hugh might be ridiculing the Book of Mormon. "So I got a little defensive," says Wright. Unable to conceal his contempt, Wright demanded, "How's it a mistake?"

Hugh responded, "Well, look at Alma, he says that all mankind is carnal, sensual, and devilish by nature. And he should have said they were carnal, sensual, devilish, and stupid."<sup>2</sup>

Carnal, sensual, and devilish are dramatic, even melodramatic, adjectives. They are seriously and scarily sinful. By adding stupid, Hugh instantly stripped them of glamour and illustrates an important truth about human nature that he has emphasized throughout his life—his refusal to take any mortal being, including himself, very seriously. He believes that humans are stupid by nature. As he stated once during an interview: "Nobody's very clever, nobody's very brave, nobody's very strong, nobody's very wise, we're all pretty stupid. That's why we're not tested in those things." What we are tested on

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<sup>2</sup>Curtis Wright, interviewed by Boyd Petersen, 24 September 2001.