

Chapter 9

“One Peep at the Other Side”: Hugh Nibley’s Life of Faith

Leonard J. Arrington, former LDS Church Historian, once named Sterling McMurrin, Lowell Bennion, and Hugh Nibley as the three “leading Mormon intellectuals” of the late-twentieth century. He characterized each man’s work: “McMurrin is concerned with ideas, Bennion with people, and Nibley with the faith.”³ Although this characterization suffers from over-simplification, I believe that Arrington correctly identified the central preoccupation of each man. Since his 1946 response to Fawn Brodie, *No, Ma’am, That’s Not History*, Hugh has established himself as an ardent and vocal advocate for the gospel. He has produced evidence to show that the Book of Mormon, the book of Moses, and the book of Abraham are ancient texts; he has argued that the Church was established by revelation; and he has professed his belief that prophetic inspiration continues to guide the Church today. As Louis Midgley, a BYU professor of political science, once put it, “With the passing of B. H. Roberts, Nibley more than anyone else has assumed the role of defender of the faith and the Saints.”⁴ Hugh has always maintained, however, that a true testimony of the gospel comes, not through argument, but through the whisperings of the Holy Ghost to each individual. Just after he turned seventy in 1980, Hugh wrote to his son, Alex:

I am trying to increase in faith, having become sort of a specialist in evidences for the Gospel. They turn up everywhere—some are convincing to others, and some are not, but I am besieged all day long by people seeking reassurance. It is infinitely

³Leonard J. Arrington, “The Intellectual Tradition of the Latter-day Saints,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 4, no. 1 (Spring 1969): 24.

⁴Louis Midgley, “Hugh Nibley: A Short Biographical Note,” *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 2, no. 1 (Spring 1967): 119.