

Chapter 21

Politics, Basketball, Patriarchs, and Temples, 1970-79

As the 1970s began,² Hugh Nibley saw BYU's condition as deplorable. Under the continuing presidency of the aging Ernest L. Wilkinson, BYU had reacted to tensions and outbreaks on other college campuses by moving even farther to the right. In March 1971, Wilkinson retired; and Dallin H. Oaks was appointed to replace him on 4 May. Hugh responded to the new administration with hope that the change meant a more moderate political emphasis and an increase in serious scholarship. A few months into the new administration, Hugh told a correspondent: "The BYU is in some sort of transition and nobody knows just which direction it will take; the main issue is whether or not it should turn to serious study."³

Wilkinson's positive legacy was a formidable physical plant. During his twenty years as president, he had more than doubled the size of the campus and erected more than two hundred buildings, including a library, a fine arts center, several classroom buildings, an administration building, a stadium, a physical education building, student housing, and a student center. Student enrollment increased six-fold to more than 25,000 students; the faculty quadrupled; and library holdings increased almost 500 percent.⁴

²Unfortunately for a biographer, the volume of Hugh's personal correspondence with friends and family dropped sharply during the 1970s. Particularly lamentable is the fact that the regular exchange between Hugh and Paul Springer essentially stopped at this time, probably because Hugh was too absorbed in his Book of Abraham studies to continue writing his regular, lengthy letters and partly because the two men, despite their long friendship, had simply drifted apart. Instead, Hugh's correspondence files are filled with hundreds of short letters to individual Church members responding to their gospel questions. Not surprisingly, Hugh reveals little about his personal life in these letters. As a consequence, I am forced to rely more on interviews and Hugh's published writings from this point.

³Hugh Nibley, Letter to Robert F. Smith, 28 October 1971.

⁴Gary James Bergera and Ronald Priddis, *Brigham Young University: A House of Faith* (Salt Lake: Signature Books,