

Chapter 23

Consecration and Recognition, 1980-89

The 1980s brought Ronald Reagan to the White House, a chill in the Cold War with the former Soviet Union, an accompanying military buildup, and a self-contented “me-generation” which was more concerned with financial gain than with social activism. At BYU, the Oaks administration had earned a reputation as being academically strong, less confrontational, and much more moderate than Wilkinson’s. As Jeffrey R. Holland took over the presidential reins in September 1980, he continued that same tradition. The affable Holland had served as dean of Religious Instruction from 1971 to 1976, where he had come to have great respect for Hugh. That respect is underscored in a 1975 memorandum that Holland, as dean, wrote to Oaks. Holland praised the great work “Hugh Nibley has done for the Church in an almost totally unique way.”³ Likewise, Hugh developed a great respect for and cordial relationship with President Holland, just as he had with President Oaks.

Although Hugh was officially retired, he was an ongoing presence on the BYU campus. Each semester, he taught at least one class—usually an honors section on the Pearl of Great Price or the Book of Mormon. As he wrote to Lucien and Marguerite

³Jeffrey Holland, Memo to Dallin H. Oaks, 14 May 1975, Dallin H. Oaks Presidential Papers, Department of Religious Instruction, L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah. Holland was arguing that, while he felt the “affective, inspirational mold” of some professors in the department was of primary importance, the “scholarly skill” of professors like Nibley “is nevertheless an important one for the Church, and probably the university as well. . . . Religious Instruction at BYU simply must have the former, but I think the Church will always need something of the latter,” wrote Holland. To that end, Holland proposed that a special section of the Religion Department—“something like our present Institute of Ancient Studies (which has no faculty per se)—be created “to keep us abreast of religious developments outside our traditional LDS undergraduate curriculum.” Apparently nothing came of this proposal.