

Chapter 26

Conclusion: Constancy Amid Change

Hugh Nibley has lived a rich life and witnessed almost the entire twentieth century. His amazing memory has stored a stunning share of it. He can remember hearing about the Titanic sinking in 1912, when he was only two years old. He recalls family conversations about World War I. He witnessed first-hand the devastating effects of the Great Depression and of World War II. It was a century of tremendous change. When Hugh was a boy, tall ships were sailing into the harbor of his hometown of Portland, Oregon, the Model-T Ford was rolling off the assembly line, and the Wright Brothers' famous flight had launched aviation only seven years before Hugh's birth. He has witnessed the move from airplanes to jetliners to spaceships. He also witnessed first-hand the transition of Mormonism from a Utah church to a world church. When Hugh was born there were only 398,000 members, sixty-two stakes, twenty-one missions, and four temples. Today there are more than 11 million members, more than 2,500 stakes, in excess of 300 missions, and 107 temples with 18 more planned.

In addition to witnessing this explosive growth, Hugh has significantly influenced the direction the Church has taken in its approach to the Book of Mormon, the Pearl of Great Price, and the temple. He has touched many individual lives as he has urged the Saints to take the law of consecration more seriously, to respect the environment, and to work for peace. Finally, he has set a wonderful example of faithful discipleship, all the while demonstrating how taking the gospel seriously liberates believers to feel joy, laugh at themselves, and relish the gifts of mortality.

Church leaders have praised him as a loyal defender of the faith who has challenged the Saints to take their religion more seriously. President Gordon B. Hinckley has "respected him highly for his great scholarship and for his quiet and humble manner. He knows what he is talking about, but he does not shout it."¹ Elder Boyd K. Packer called

¹Gordon B. Hinckley, Letter to Boyd Petersen, 5 October 1989. I read part of this chapter at the FARMS Brown Bag Lunch Lecture Series, 20 November 1996. It appeared as "Youth and Beauty: The Correspondence of