



Temple and Cosmos: Beyond This Ignorant Present

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Don E. Norton , Don Norton (Editor)**

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Heather says

Kind of interesting. "The temple is a point of reference, a place where you take your bearings on the universe (p. 141)."

Rob says

Like any heterogenous collection of essays, some parts of Temple and Cosmos were better than others. Being a retrospective of a career, there was even a fair bit of overlap. Those weaknesses acknowledged, there were still interesting nuggets to be mined--especially regarding the cosmo-centrism of certain parts of the apocrypha. These were often dismissed as "gnostic" heresies, but often had very little to do with gnostic beliefs--just a way for the early canonizers to tidy up doctrinal controversies.

It would be interesting to revisit some of these subjects with up-to-date research--especially consensus views, as I'm worried that sometimes the minority view was chosen to support a thesis.

Sirpa Grierson says

It is not that I love Hugh Nibley's writing style so much; but he is the ultimate historio-archeological packrat and has researched every topic of interest to him to the nth degree of what is available in the scholarship of the world at a given time. Fascinating and fabulous romp through the world of ideas. He additionally leaves you to draw your own conclusions, which I appreciate!

My favorite chapters (now that I am finally done with all 600 pages) are 3 & 7. What a gift to be trusted by an author to make the connections yourself.

p. 534 (talking about C.S. Lewis) ". . . the test of the Christian is not to conform with the commandments and accept teachings which are perfectly right and sensible to any normal way of thinking; if the gospel consisted only of such convenient and unobjectionable things, we could be quite sure we were making it up ourselves. It is the very contrariness and even the absurdity of the Christian teachings that provide, for him, the highest proof of their divinity--this is not man's doing." Why else are we commanded to seek for answers if they are too easily accessible? The terrible questions that Nibley raises are "Strange doctrines" indeed! this book invites you to step beyond "the ignorant present."

Michael says

A line from page 64 aptly summarizes Nibley's work: "It is because others are engaged in the work that we know that we are not just imagining it." It's been said that metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct, and that's mostly what I found here. He frequently cherrypicks his evidence, resorts to ad hominem attacks, and, in the sections originally delivered orally, uses an exasperating tone. Clever, yes; erudite, without question; useful in answering the Great Questions, not very--at least not for me.

Joe Hunt says

I think this is one of the finest religious books ever!

And it goes through everything--a ton of stuff...

fr/ an apocalyptic excerpt about Abraham seeing a star born or dying. And he's like "What's going on? This is spooky."

And of course a lot on temples. An interesting piece on how it can be a circle and a square at the same time. (I think Picasso talked about that: "Squaring the circle.")

But, so, a temple can be the center of the world--but, then, you can have more than one. And they're like little sparks that get sent out.

I think Nibley's a genius. (Read a lot of him.) Has a nice, easy-going manner. Sometimes you wished he went deeper in, instead of just skimming over. B/c he covers so much ground.

One nice section about the invention of language--how it's dumb to think it started, like from a picture of the sun, and then turned into an O.

No. That it had to arrive in one piece, inspired. B/c it is abstract, to have little scratches mean things. (But he explains it better than me.)

I would recommend this book, yes!

Keith says

This morning [March 2, 2014] we went to the Gilbert Temple Dedication. I came home with lots of thoughts running through my head. After pondering for a few minutes, I decided to begin reading the book *Temple and Cosmos*, one of the volumes of the collected works of Hugh Nibley.

The first chapter was fascinating. The first four chapters are on temples. The balance, and majority of the book is on *Cosmos*.

"In 1816, the apocrypha were outlawed by the American Bible Society (which had great influence). So they came to have no prestige, were not read, were not known at all. They were not published in this country; little was known about them. The apocrypha sank to their lowest level in 1945, when H. H. Rowley, the last surviving person to study the apocrypha said, 'We'll just close the door now and forget about these. Nobody's

reading them anymore. It is so.' And then, bingo, next year the whole thing broke loose again, and everyone was embarrassed, because no one knew anything about apocrypha. The new discoveries caught them completely off guard. (Page 258-259)

"The way these writings talk about these matters is extremely interesting it certainly beats science fiction. ... Since the ideas are nothing but conscious or unconscious plagiarism of biblical and apocryphal ideas ... why do these works have so much greater appeal than the originals? Because the originals, as they are given in the Bible and the apocrypha, have been systematically denatured. ... science fiction - 'folk scripture' - has taken the place of real scripture. (Page 275-276) The science fiction chapter is quite a bit later in the book.

"A wonderful passage from Socrates says, 'When I was a kid and went to school, science knew all the answers' ... "Plutarch talks about the same thing. He says the new physics taught people 'to despise all the superstitious fears which the awe-inspiring signs in the heavens arouse in the minds of those who are ignorant of the real cause of things.' (Page 516) And on and on it goes, with the 20th and 21st century getting the same anti-god rhetoric as millennium ago. The conflict between good and evil has not changed, and will continue.

JJ says

For me the most interesting of the Nibley books. Nibley surveys religious temples throughout the world and history drawing parallels among the key functions and rites associated with them.

The consistencies among the various temples leads the reader to believe there may be one central source, either historical, geographical, or spiritual behind the various temple cultures in history.

This book launched me into an enduring fascination with ancient texts and ancient ritual.

Sarah says

yeah - too much for me to handle as a whole. This is one to pick up every once in awhile and read another chapter - especially because it wasn't designed as a book. It's a collection of his speeches and essays -but put in an order that would make the most sense - so it's slightly repetitive.

Anne Cabaniss says

If I had a year or two, I'd like to read this book again while looking up all the references.

Bubba says

Mind Expanding

This book was an incredible read from start to finish. It opened my eyes to ancient texts and reaffirmed that

the ordinances and symbolisms employed in modern temples are the same as those done anciently.

Absolutely a worthy book for any gospel collection.

thethousanderclub says

For Latter-day Saints, Hugh Nibley is a household name. He was a prominent Mormon scholar for decades and is probably still the most well-known. His writing and speeches are works of sometimes dizzying intellect. I was very excited to read one volume of his collected works series, *Temple and Cosmos*. After having been fairly underwhelmed by W. Cleon Skousen's *The First Two Thousand Years*, it was wonderful to read a book of both doctrinal and intellectual significance as interesting and provocative as *Temple and Cosmos*.

Of all Latter-day Saint doctrine and practice, there is perhaps none more mysterious and enigmatic to non-members and outside observers than our temple worship. (This is also the case for some members of the Church who have not been able to experience the temple endowment and sealing yet or have and still find it all inscrutable). Nibley's academic work on tracing the origins of the temple, not just Latter-day Saint temple worship but temple practices and rituals around the world and throughout all civilizations, provides a valuable perspective on how central it was and is to the human experience. In many ways, reading *Temple and Cosmos* was very similar to reading Joseph Campbell's challenging but remarkable *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. There are commonalities between cultures, between peoples, between rituals that are so striking they cannot be ignored. There are patterns on earth within the human experience which are continually being played out. The tantalizing question is where the pattern originates from? Nibley, while focusing on the central importance of the temple, attempts to answer that question with exhaustive research and references from ancient writings and evidences. The academic work showcased within this one volume of his collection is staggering.

Therein lies one of the problems with a book like *Temple and Cosmos*. These collected writings are culled from speeches, academic papers—some previously unpublished—which aren't exactly written for a lay audience. Nibley's writing, much like his speaking, moves at a breakneck speed. You've barely had a moment to digest a particularly interesting quotation or comment, and he has already thrown four more at you. It's difficult to keep up. In addition, with very little background in ancient cultures or civilizations, a reader like me can't actually compare a statement by Nibley with a contradictory statement by another scholar; I wouldn't even know where to look. However, Nibley does a fine job, much better than Skousen ever thought of doing in *The First Two Thousand Years*, of presenting some opposing viewpoints. It is true he mostly does this to create a springboard from which to disprove the statement; however, it's serviceable nonetheless.

Although this volume, which is the twelfth in the series, is titled *Temple and Cosmos* and mostly focuses on that topic, it does take some odd deviations. (Of course this doesn't really have anything to do with Nibley since these are his collected works, which I'm assuming were put together without any direction from Nibley). Having said that, some of those "deviation" chapters proved to be some of the most valuable. Nibley's essay *Does History and Religion Conflict* is one of the finest I have ever read. I consumed it ravenously and will forever consider it a high-water mark of academic commentary and critique. Nibley, although steeped in academia, appears to have had a healthy distrust of it, which I can certainly appreciate (see my commentary *Academic Humility*).

Temple and Cosmos is wonderful. From a Latter-day Saint perspective it is an unbelievably valuable addition to our personal libraries and to our understanding of the temple ordinances; in fact, for someone who has "gone through" (common Mormon vernacular) the temple, Temple and Cosmos may make you feel a tad bit uncomfortable at times as it describes in some detail ancient patterns of temple worship. Those patterns and other details, as delineated in apocryphal writings, show why our scripture would describe the gospel as being "new and everlasting." I will absolutely read Nibley's other volumes of collected works. In regards to Temple and Cosmos, it is a significant and important academic achievement which Latter-day Saints should take special interest in.

<http://thethousanderclub.blogspot.com/>

Samuel says

In Hugh Nibley's *the Temple and Cosmos: Beyond the Ignorant Present*, the author explores and expands upon the assertion that the "temple is a scale model of the universe." Speaking to Mormonism's belief in a restorationist view of temple worship, Nibley ties the current practice of Mormon temple-building back to the Temple of Solomon, the Tabernacle of Moses, and the altar built by Adam. According to his writings on Mormon theology, sacred places (usually temples) have always been made available to the children of God as a "link between the seeming chaos and dissolution of this temporal world and the beautiful configuration (cosmos) and permanence of the eternal order." He begins with a discussion of the second law of thermodynamics—that of entropy in which all matter dissolves into chaos—and asserts that temple-building has long been practiced as a counter-measure by societies: as "an organizing, ordering force in the universe that is very active." Nibley even goes as far as to say that the temple is "the core of all of our civilization" in both its heirocentric organizing geometry and written language that has its origins in near eastern temples. While these claims are indeed bold and seem to overemphasize the importance of the temple in modern society, Nibley does construct an interesting and compelling case for reconsidering the meaning, importance, and legacy of the temple in both its ancient and modern iterations: a place that claims to connect heaven and earth.

Nibley divides his book into two parts: the first part deals with the "Temple" and explains the nature, meaning, and history of the temple typology in near eastern societies while the second part concerns itself with "Cosmos" and seeks to explain the cosmic context of the temple and the "terrible questions" it seeks to answer—Where did we come from? Why are we here? and Where are we going? Unlike many other books concerning Mormon architecture, this one has a refreshing and welcome amount of illustrations. While they are line drawings—as opposed to photographs—they offer helpful guides to understanding the form of Mormon Temples as well as their ancient precedents. Nibley is particularly interested in the circle and the square motifs that show up in many temple-building societies: the circle representing the cosmos (heavens) and the square representing the earth. The temple ties these two systems together and therefore many temples embody the formal qualities of both the circle and the square. In the "Cosmos" section, Nibley is very interested in using apocrypha—particularly the Dead Sea Scrolls—to defend Mormon doctrine and practices concerning temple-building and temple worship. Hugh Nibley is the quintessential Mormon apologetic and while his primary audience is Mormons, he uses scholarly language and speaks directly to secular doubts concerning The Book of Mormon, temple worship, and other areas of Mormon doctrine. This collection of essays does have some sweeping claims about "society" at large that are surely vulnerable to criticism, but it does represent the most thorough attempt by a scholar to explain the connection Mormon theology attempts to make between heaven and earth, the past and the present, and the beginning and end of time. As Nibley summarizes it: "The temple represents that organizing principle in the universe which brings all things

together. It is the school where we learn about these things.”

Hyrum says

Great insight into ancient civilizations and their view of the temple. Wide references sited. Many things learned are intentionally not spelled out in the text.

Jeanne says

What an enlightening read!!! If you are a temple-attending Mormon, you will see the mounds and mounds of ancient evidence pointing to this truth: that Mormon temple rites are restored from the ancient religion that Jesus Christ established.

How did Joseph Smith come up with all the exact rituals of ancient Christianity? Answer: he couldn't. This book proves that those rituals had to be revealed to him.

No one knows what to do with temples. Only the Mormons know the true purpose of the temple, which Peter and other apostles continued to visit even after Christ's resurrection. Modern Christianity has to dismiss the temple because they don't know its purpose. There was a lot of cover up in ancient times, but the true temple worship was restored.

Carolyn says

I am rereading Temple and Cosmos. Whenever I want to have questions answered about early manuscripts, metal plates and papyri, Christian and non, I turn to Nibley for in-depth (and very detailed) answers. He loves explaining very early pre-Christ writings for those of us who do not have and never will have access to them.

I am always fascinated with the idea that the temple, including clothing and ceremonial rites were many thousands of years old before Christ. Also how intertwined are temple and ceremonial rites among various cultures, especially Jewish and Egyptian.

I remember well a lecture by C. Wilfred Griggs when he explained how early Christians were buried in their leather garments (with certain markings) in excavations in which he had participated. Nibley explains this well.
