

# Will removing evil create a utopia?

Occasionally a book is a political event. Hugh Nibley's latest volume, "Approaching Zion," fits this description. LDS readers recognize Nibley as a capable defender of the faith. But this is the first time Nibley has produced a book devoted largely to political themes; his observations will be useful to non-LDS Utahns of a liberal political bent.

What is Zion? According to Nibley, it is nothing less than the Utopia mankind has sought throughout the ages. It is a society from which evil has been removed by the roots, as "The love of money is the root of all evil." According to Nibley, all of the evils that afflict the world are produced by the inequality inherent in a materialistic society.

Utah as described by Nibley is deeply mired in the miasma of materialism. "No democratic society in the world has greater inequality of wealth than Utah," he asserts (pg. 473). Furthermore, according to Nibley, Utah leads the nation in the three "Prime Evils Of Our Time": greed, neglect of the environment and militarism (pg. 255).

The campus of BYU sometimes appears to be a forest of dark business suits, and Nibley sees this as evidence of a shift in focus from the liberal arts to the art of business. He urges that Utahns place less emphasis on "goods of second intent" (things we need to live, such as a job and transportation) and more on "goods of first intent" (things we live for, such as art, literature and faith). Nibley is in fine voice as a critic of materialism and parsimony, but it is difficult to hear him above the anguished squeals of the capitalist baby being thrown out with the bathwater.

Nibley's contempt for capitalism leads him into some embarrassing rhetorical excesses. For example: "A frenzy of privatization now insists that the only public institution with a reason for existence is the military, to defend us against societies more committed to sharing, and to root out those among us who doubt the sacredness of property" (pg. 467). Which of our adversaries could be described as "society



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"more committed to sharing"?

In an essay titled "The Utopians," Nibley reviews the contributions made by Utopian philosophers throughout history; Nibley remarks that this chapter could be titled "Holy Men Ye Know Not Of" (pg. 487). All of the Utopians listed in this essay delivered scathing indictments of the status quo and offered a Utopian model as an alternative. Nibley appears to concur with Thomas More's judgment that "where private property rules ... it is virtually impossible for society to flourish under righteous administration ... the only way to cure the evil is by economic equality, which is simply not possible as long as property is privately owned" (pp. 502-502).

Under the Zionist Utopia, Nibley points out, "We (would) have no laws ordering men to be charitable and open-handed" (pg. 218). However, other Utopians — including several of those on Nibley's list of "Holy Men" — have had few compunctions about making "windows into men's souls." Nibley does not urge the immediate imposition of a Zion government, but his political observations leave little doubt that Zion is the standard to which he holds lawmakers.

The premise that the love of money is the root of all evil is problematic. Stalin wasn't after money; in fact, he proposed to abolish money altogether. Hitler's holocaust was conducted at a financial loss. The most murderous tyranny in history has been the product of an attempt to eliminate the inequalities that Nibley abhors.