

House of the Temple, House of the Lord: A View From Philadelphia

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The lord whose oracle is at Delphi neither speaks nor
conceals, but gives signs (Heraclitus).

THREE STEPS. A TERRACE. FIVE STEPS. A TERRACE. Seven steps. A terrace. Nine steps. A final broad terrace. Stone sphinxes (one for wisdom, one for power) flanked me on either side. Above me, like an ancient Egyptian mountain carved by holy men, towered the massive House of the Temple, deliberately intimidating to any “profane” seeking admittance.

I pressed a tiny button as a small sign directed (really wishing I could knock with the big brass ring hanging from the mouth of a flaming lion’s head) and waited.

The pyramidal, columned edifice, headquarters of the Mother Supreme Council of the Thirty-Third and Last Degree, Ancient and Accepted Scottish Rite of Freemasonry, Southern Jurisdiction, U.S.A., stands at the corner of Sixteenth and S streets in Washington, D.C., not far south from the fine old Mormon chapel whose stained glass representations of the Restoration now shed their muted light on committed followers of the Reverend Moon. Taking their cue from the Great Architect of the Universe, Freemasons have always meticulously ordered their physical environments. Space is organized to facilitate mental change. Initiates pass along a symbolic route meant to transform them. Put most simply: the building makes the man.

I looked around at the ritually measured steps, the sphinxes, the thirty-three columns surrounding the building, the heavy, locked doors, and con-

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templated the wealth, power, and exclusivity the building represented. Would passage through this building change me? A second time, I rang the bell.

The day before, I had come by train from Philadelphia to Washington to gather information for a paper on "Aspects of Freemasonry in the Mormon Temple." Waiting at the station for my cousin, I bought a copy of the *Washington Post* and in the book review section read the story of Robert Fitzroy, captain of the *Beagle*, that doggy ship we remember because the young Charles Darwin was among its passengers. Like Darwin, Fitzroy was a young upper-class Englishman. But unlike his soon-to-be famous passenger, he was a passionately fundamentalist Christian (and a strong advocate of slavery). Fitzroy visited the same exotic places as Darwin and witnessed the same phenomena, but his different lens of understanding (literalistic Biblical) led him to experience a radically different world from Darwin's. When Darwin began publishing his findings soon after his return to England, Fitzroy felt implicated in the rise of an idea that threatened his traditional Christian view of the cosmos. He was tortured by the thought of his own complicity, tormented — until one day he burst into a room where scientists had gathered to discuss evolution. Theatrically, desperately, touched by a spirit inimical to the new science, Fitzroy waved an open Bible over his head and shouted to the flabbergasted scientists: "The Book! The Book! the B-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-o-k!"

Finally my cousin arrived.

He and I are not as different as were Darwin and Fitzroy, although what he told me on the way to his apartment about his work on Ronald Reagan's re-election campaign gave me the feeling that our politics would not lead to a sudden and perfect rapport. Nor would our economic situations, I thought, as we neared his home in the condominiumed splendor of Pentagon City. We did agree, however, that we would both like to attend sacrament meeting that afternoon at his ward.

The Potomac Ward parking lot looked like a well-stocked BMW dealership. The chapel breathed pastel elegance. The congregation listened intently as a speaker bore mellifluous witness to "the most correct book on the face of the earth."

Immersed in the pervasive well-being of the suburban Washington chapel, electronically amplified words washing around me, I perversely rebelled against the prevailing spirit of ease and resolution. Unavoidably I began making perilous and ludicrous contrasts between the well-heeled, cultured piety of this environment and the deprivation, ruin, and violence of north Philadelphia (where my wife and I were eking out a student-family's existence). Synapses opened and closed, adrenaline shot into my blood, very recent memories hurtled through my consciousness.

Last week, while standing in the Broad Street bus, I stupidly ignored the process of my own victimization by a skillful pickpocket: the unnecessary jostling by a commuter at my back, the conspiratorial looks of confederates on either side, young men disarmingly lost to the driving rap beat in their headphones. Robbed for the second time in a month. (The first had been a useless break-in — what did we have that they would want anyway? It's a wonder

they didn't trash our place out of spite.) But the pickpockets expertly fleeced me of the money for my research trip to Washington — and the precious means for Elizabeth's art lessons. Now when someone brushes up against me on a subway or crowded sidewalk, my hand goes to my wallet and lurid scenes of imagined violence pass through my mind's eye.

Fortunately, a grant from our bishop (he says a generous couple once supported his education) foiled the pickpocket and got me to a pastel chapel in Washington, where I now heard an undersecretary for something-or-other report on how hospitably the saints in Paris accepted her during a recent visit. "The Church is the same wherever you go."

That night my cousin and I had a long talk. I was thankful for his hospitality; but in spite of that and the fact that the Church is the same wherever you go, we were repeatedly at odds. He expressed concern over the topic of my paper, suggesting that the Mason-Mormon connection might be better left untouched. Instead of derivation and congruence, why not talk about this Church's uniqueness? Why write speculative history anyway? All history is analogical and speculative, I pointed out. Was he suggesting that history be forgotten? I tried to see things his way but had difficulties getting past my own prejudices. So did he. His faith seemed based on answers whose questions undergird my own. Although we disagreed on almost everything, we still conversed for hours. Perhaps that itself was a small victory for us both.

The next morning, on my way to the House of the Temple, my cousin kindly initiated me into urban masonry, the first order of which comprehends the computerized efficiency and antiseptic cleanliness of the new subway system. He led me down a swift and silent escalator into a vast, vaulted chamber. In exchange for a green bill bearing Masonic symbols (a pyramid capped by an all-seeing eye), we entered the subway. Conversing quietly, we rode a swift car through dark passageways: from Pentagon City to Arlington National Cemetery, on to Foggy Bottom, and into the heart of the city. There we ascended from the secret bowels of the earth to sidewalks where the world's largest contingent of lawyers and secretaries rushed to work. My cousin joined the phalanx of lawyers, and I made my way up Sixteenth Street to the House of the Temple.

A third time I pressed the bell, nervous about what awaited me.

The longer its doors remained closed, the more intimidating the building grew. Part of the Masons' attraction is that they don't try to attract. Proselytizing is forbidden, and frightful oaths protect the secrecy of their rituals.

I peered through the glass door. Through semidarkness a little old man approached and opened the door. I showed him my letter of invitation, then followed him through a large atrium, prodigiously appointed with white marble, polished green granite, and heavy oak beams. Doric columns competed with black Egyptian figures, Greek vase paintings with Egyptian hieroglyphics.

The stone, wood, and gold paint were impressive; but the library, reached after progressing through a series of halls and rooms, struck my literarily educated senses as the ultimate in enclosed space. Books of every size, age, language, and shape rose in varicolored ranks to a vaulted, skylit ceiling.

The librarian, a kindly, middle-aged German woman, greeted me warmly. At her request, I gave her a list of books I wanted to see first; as she bustled away with energy I came to admire over the next days, I again contemplated the room. It reminded me of similar places, other sancta dedicated to the word, other protected inner rooms housing written visions and revisions, harboring texts both public and intimate, exoteric and esoteric: library rooms in New York, Provo, Tuebingen — and Princeton.

It was at Princeton that I met Alfred Bush, head of the university library's Western Americana collection. Over several months (I drove up daily from Philadelphia), he introduced me to his collection of texts and artifacts, both Mormon and Masonic. One day he showed me a first edition of the *Book of Commandments* he had just purchased for the library. Another day it was a letter from Brigham Young to a wayward wife, offering to come pick her up himself if she would come back. I read about Joseph Smith sounding the Masonic distress cry — "Is there no help for the widow's son?" — in the moments before his death. Most fascinating of all was the seerstone, once used by Joseph, now encased in a velvet-lined box. Through the geode's hollow center, guided by a triangle of crystals, I could pretend, could long to see the world as Joseph Smith saw it. This stone acted for a time as his Delphi. I wondered about the signs it gave.

The librarian brought me a large stack of books — eighteenth- and nineteenth-century volumes for which there had been no great demand over the last century or so. I blew clouds of very fine, black dust from each book before I opened it, making liberal use of the disposable hand towels the librarian provided and wondering about documented cases of black lung in library workers.

Lunchtime came and the librarian directed me to a McDonalds a few blocks away (she had sized up my pocketbook rather handily). Outside, blinking in the harsh light of midday, I ritually left the House of the Temple behind — nine steps, seven, five, and three — and walked through a neighborhood of once fine townhouses. My coat and tie had fit in well enough in the subway among lawyers and also in the library, but walking among the new tenants of the decaying buildings (the people whose threatening presence may have contributed to the sale of the old Mormon chapel), my clothing set me apart. However, under the golden arches all are equal, and I ate my lunch in a plastic environment among people with culinary tastes as indiscriminating as my own.

Back in the library, drowsily trying to read a deadly sociological study of Freemasonry under the influence of McDonalds' grease and sugar, my mind wandered to the vivid image of the bearded, sallow, shivering, overcoated man I had seen propped against the outside of the House of the Temple (oblivious to the ninety-degree heat). Strands of memory grew taut and resonant, and I relived a winter journey through Philadelphia, a trek necessitated by a sudden need for funds. Personal history. Existential history. The figured history of my life as opposed to the abstract history I was tracing on paper.

I hiked and hitchhiked through the city, through the litter-strewn woods in Fern Rock, through North Philadelphia bombed back into the Stone Age by

age, neglect, and malevolence. Men stared at me as I passed their fires lit in drums, the ascending flames stoked with the ripped-out ribbing of building carcasses great and humble. I stumbled over rusting tracks running in once-purposeful grids through the gaunt ruins of commerce. I passed Dropsie University, festooned with graffiti and blackened by exhaust fumes and arson, and came to the Interstate Blood Bank. Four weeks earlier I'd bled for thrombosis research. Good money on a one-pint basis. But the interval between then and now was too short, and mine was an immediate, nontrifling need: a birthday dress for Elizabeth, a denial of the marginality of our poverty.

I joined the early morning lineup of regulars, the several dozen other residents of that forlorn territory, hoping to get in on the plasma donors program. Men warmed chilled bodies by sitting on open heating grates in the sidewalk; others gathered, arms extended, fingers spread out toward the intense heat cast out from great, perforated barrels. I tried not to stare too hard at these or at others: the men with the DTs in front of me in the line, the one moaning, sweating, and stinking behind me. Peering in, I read the familiar, worn sign near the door: "Would you like to earn \$87 a month? Ask about the Plasma Program. Donors with poor hygiene and body odor will not be processed." Most of us were turned away that morning. I didn't have enough identification, the man behind me was rejected when the medical technicians found the tracks between his thighs and toes.

Finally that night I stood at the end of the platform at the old Reading terminal off North Broad, under an implacable sky, a tender, star-dappled sky, imploring, like a child, for simple answers to numbing complexities and for the easing of that city's pain.

Back from dream memories of Philadelphia, refreshed by my furtive nap, I worked through the afternoon. Periodically the man who had let me in the front door led small groups of people through. I could hear his tour-guide intonations (boyish pride laced with bored familiarity) in adjoining rooms:

"This Bible, 150 years old, has each letter printed in gold."

"The silver ball here opens up to reveal a complete set of Masonic jewels or symbols. Notice the trowel, compass, square, and plumb line."

"This is the universal room. Each bookcase houses Masonic books from a particular country. We used to have each country's flag displayed above the cabinets, but today so many countries are communistic, and we won't allow communistic flags here, so we just took them all down."

"In this room is our Robert Burns collection, the most complete set of published material outside of Scotland written by and about our illustrious brother."

"The hammering and drilling you hear down the hall is from our Dynamic Freedoms Room. We are installing a new display there: torture instruments of the Catholic Inquisition, recently donated by an Italian brother."

While I worked and the tours went on, the librarian answered her telephone:

"Lib'ry! . . . No sur, we do not have the Knights of Columbus ritul . . . That is what I said, ritul. You should call the Lib'ry of Congress . . . Thank you, sur."

“Lib’ry! . . . The Bolivian delegation is bringing how many extra pursons? . . . But I only ordered two cars for them. Are they small people?”

In the meantime, I read a novel (published in Germany in 1870) in which one of the characters writes eccentric letters from Salt Lake City describing the Mormons. He explains “Mormon Masonry” by referring to W. W. Phelps’s supposed years of study at Göttingen under the philosopher/Masonic reformer Krause. (That was new to me and probably would have surprised W. W. Phelps as well.)

I finally emerged from the dim coolness of the House of the Temple at four o’clock with a satisfying stack of notes in hand.

Tuesday and Wednesday were much like Monday: riding the subway in with my cousin (we continued to agree on very little, but we were still talking), reading old books from eight to four, and discovering the city in the late afternoons and evenings.

B’nai Brith and the National Rifle Association have headquarters on the same block. The Australian Embassy was tearing up great expanses of reinforced concrete to install heating wires under the entrance to an underground garage (the ambassador must have had a difficult winter). The Russian Embassy really does have a forest of antennae on its roof. The National Gallery closes at five, so if you walk through a rain storm for forty-five minutes after working until four and then hope to spend the rest of the afternoon there, you should forget it, go home, and dry your shoes.

Twice I fled from the prevailing heat and light into theaters. I saw *The Brother from Another Planet* and *The Gods Must Be Crazy*, two films about men thrust into alien cultures. The stories of those two black men dealing with their absurd, liminal conditions in shockingly new habitats made me recall images of the winter we spent at the literal edge of Philadelphia.

Finally, after weeks of apartment hunting (while grossly overstaying the hospitality of our home teacher, whose large family already made his house small), we found a place. Not elegant, and in a tough, ragged neighborhood, but with two bedrooms and a rent we decided we could afford. With two-thirds of our savings we paid the security deposit and the first month’s rent. Two days later we arrived with our first load of belongings.

A disheveled woman with crying children behind her skirts and in her arms confronted us as we opened the door.

“What you doin’ in my apartment?”

Over the next hour we established that the manager who had taken our money was no manager, but rather an enterprising former tenant still in possession of a key.

Too bad.

We decided that with our remaining money we could outfit ourselves with a tent, sleeping bags, and cooking equipment. It was mid-February, and spring was no more than a month away. We would be our own landlords in a state park just outside the city. Three times a week I could drive in to Temple University to teach the class for which I received a slim stipend; my own studies would simply have to wait.

Through the flattening patina of memory, the deprivations are obscured, most details washed out. But some resist the benign mendacity of passing time and are still served up piping hot like the fish and barley soup upon which we largely subsisted during our sojourn in the woods. Spring that year did not arrive until mid-April; the winter was bitter and protracted. What returns to mind are our acts of survival, shorn of ambiguity, so unlike the academic, urbane assertions to which I was habituated and which routinely die a death of a thousand qualifications. Here wood had to be gathered and protected from impending storms and food eaten carefully, with thought for our limited stores. Had the tent been restaked? Was there enough fuel for the lantern? Would the socks dry overnight? I remember melting chunks of snow and ice over a wood-stoked flame, then boiling the water to heat milk bottles for two young boys; cracking open black walnuts with stained fingers and savoring their crushed meat; noting deer tracks in the snow and the depressions left by their bodies near our pitched tent and glowing coals; and seeing Elizabeth, stripped to the waist, bathing her supple frame, washing golden hair under the spout of frigid water from a rustic pump.

Once we began a rather bucolic walk to feed scraps to the ducks who inhabited a tiny portion of the lake kept liquid by a warm spring or a current or a glitch in the universe. Our two-year-old, Avi, and our four-year-old, Michael, layered in snowsuit over snowsuit, looked like ambulatory balls of clothing. Neither boy sensed the precariousness of our existence, and they jabbered happily while we fed the ducks. Elizabeth and I were picking up sticks of fallen wood for our fire when we heard a soft, liquid plop behind us. Michael began to call his brother's name: frightened, envious, admonishing — it wasn't clear. We turned and found Avi floating on his back in the freezing water, not yet frightened, only accepting, like a gentle Zen bundle. He began to sink, and I splashed to his rescue. Elizabeth ripped off layers of his already freezing clothing and thrust his little body inside her own clothing. We raced to the car and careened down slippery roads to Birdsboro, some miles distant. There in a laundromat we dried the only clothes he had, layer after layer, like the street people we nearly were. At night, in the scarcely tempered cold of our tent, I lay awake gnawing on the bitter bone of the effects of my choices on our children and on Elizabeth. At what point had the "nobility" (I've been so self-righteous about this!) of *Torah L'shmah*, or learning for its own sake, taken on such a sobering, mortal, threatening aspect? I dreamed that night of handing over my children to the dean of students and receiving a slim folder in return: "Aspects of Freemasonry in the Mormon Temple."

Thursday I read a nineteenth-century exposé of Masonic rites, a book that came out of the William Morgan affair in upstate New York. (Morgan, a renegade Mason, disappeared after publishing what he had sworn to keep secret. Joseph Smith later married his widow.) The book was despicable, an exposé of the worst sort (the author gave participants in the ritual names like "Woodenhead"), but I needed the information. I mollified my conscience by considering how Freemasons themselves would profit from my work.

As I read, I was struck by the fact that Joseph Smith drew symbols, tokens, and even whole phrases from the Masonic rite. I could see why Masons were upset by the unauthorized and creative use Joseph and Brigham made of rituals they had learned in Freemasonic lodges. But Mormons have assiduously maintained the secrecy of the rites Masons too regard as most sacred. In fact, I thought, Masons might be somewhat gratified to know that many Mormons believe, more strongly than most contemporary Masonic historians, that parts of the Masonic rituals descend directly from Solomon's temple.

That evening, after reading Masonic rituals all day in the House of the Temple, I joined my cousin and members of his ward in the House of the Lord — the Washington, D.C., Temple.

Although it was a real pleasure to see all those fashion plates in standard issue (white, fat, polyester ties), unnerving critical feelings disturbed the more profound pleasures I had hoped to find in the temple. I began to fear that I had lost the spirit of this place, which I valued above all other places. The entire building seemed to me a sacrifice on the altar of efficiency: the inner architecture featuring locker rooms (where ritual goods are exchanged for money), the plastic theater seats, the intrusive binary-minded computers. Like other temples, this building is intended to affect those who pass through it; but less scrupulously crafted, it lacks the symbolic density of our older temples. Remembered visits to the Manti Temple, a fine building illuminated by hand-wrought beauty and intended symbolic details, made the new, machine-tooled efficiency all the more empty.

Dominated by the critical feelings and cares I so wished to be free of in the Lord's house, I wondered about my own unworthiness, my own lack of charity. Were they blocking the light I had come to find, or was this modern temple, partially uprooted from its historical and symbolic context, "making the man"?

While I tried to sort truth from self-deception, the lights dimmed and the film began. My critical mood continued as a plethora of celluloid images specifically interpreted and limited a text much richer as a sparse, live, intense drama.

Finally, however, as the great story of creation unfolded before me and the drama of the fall was enacted one more time, I found myself responding to the ritual with alertness and a gratefully open mind and heart.

Having just read the Masonic rite, I was immediately struck by the contrast. While our ceremony shares some wonderful phrases and symbols with the Masons, it has a substantial body and broad context of its own. The Masons focus on different matters: on the building of Solomon's temple, for instance, on allegories drawn from the craft of masonry, on predominately moral concerns. They have a decidedly different sense of who we are and of our relationship with God. Despite the formal similarities, I was impressed by how much of the ritual was exclusively our own, and I was thrilled by the message I was getting.

Our theology is largely narrative, and what we find in the temple is no exception. As a result, our learning in the Lord's house depends upon our personal interpretation (inspired, at best, by the Holy Spirit). The insights

I had that Thursday night changed my view of the world. But my reading of the temple ceremony is just that, my reading. Without the keys of authority (or even with them), attempting to specify *the* meaning of the ritual text automatically limits it, as does the overly specific film. *Caveat lector!*

As the Bible tells us (and I choose the account in Genesis so as to unencumber my telling of the ritually protected story), God created man (male and female) in his own image. He gave them two commandments: (1) to multiply and (2) not to eat of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Then Eve discovered that the fruit would make her like God. Although Adam at first refused to partake of the fruit, choosing instead what he took to be obedience (there was no curse mentioned for not multiplying), Eve recognized the value of the fruit, desired it, and partook. In Greek myth, Prometheus stole fire from the gods and suffered eternally for his assault on Olympus. As we interpret Genesis, however, God *wanted* Eve to become like him. The second half of becoming like him, however (the half the devil, in his blindness, did not understand), involved the obedience Adam chose in the beginning. Adam and Eve, together, did the Lord's will and were collectively like him. Individually, both were flawed. Eve (dis)obediently reached for the fire; Adam chose obedience. The two experiences or attitudes were *both* necessary, although obviously contradictory. After single-mindedly taking the fire/fruit, however, Eve proved herself more fully worthy by bowing to the commandment that required not only her obedience to God but also, symbolically, to Adam.

As the story continued in the temple, the same lesson was repeated again and again in different forms. Through various symbolic structures, we (women and men) were offered the fire and then required to be obedient. We moved in the often-repeated dialectic from binding to unleashing, from obedience to (dis)obedience, from the strictures of sociality to the freedom of independence. For every law given there were extraordinary promises of freedom; for every spark of fire there were strict conditions.

In my interpretation of the ceremony, God desires at once our faithful disobedience and our fidelity. He wants us to leap and strive and grasp for his fire, while at the same time submitting ourselves to his will. He justifies neither the rebellious nor the obedient exclusively, but only rebellion *and* obedience. He bade Moses approach the burning bush and yet commanded him to remove his sandals. A Mormon reading of the Fall honors Eve for the fruit of her transgression and Adam for his fidelity to the law and to his mate — which bring us an interesting point, which I might label “and not for Eve's transgression.” In 1984 the Southern Baptist Convention overwhelmingly endorsed a resolution stating that as Eve brought sin into the world, women should not be ordained to the ministry. I suppose that any Jewish or Christian practice that subordinates women to men justifies itself through Genesis 3:16: “Your desire shall be to your husband, and he shall rule over you.” Have we not acquiesced, in our own practices, to this traditional reading, although our theology states specifically that “men [and women] will be punished for their own sins, and not for Adam's [or Eve's] transgression.” Both sexes are created in the image

of God and must learn similar lessons in order to fulfill that measure of their creation.

I know that what seemed so clear to me leaves out selected parts of the story (as do all interpretations) — the rib, the millennia of patriarchy, polygamy, and the near invisibility of our Mother in Heaven. But for a brief shining moment I felt I had cut through a knotty problem with a laser beam of insight.

In the celestial room after the ceremonies, I sat with my cousin and discussed the symbolic experience we had just had. His face lit up as he agreed and disagreed with my reading of the ceremony, and my understanding of what had transpired was enriched by the particularity of his experience. Gone were the tentativeness and distrust that had clouded our first discussions. The terms and spirit of our conversation were transfigured by a shared desire for faithful inquiry, a desire nourished by the spirit of the place, and perhaps even by our previous, seemingly unfruitful discussions. Whatever our final conclusions, we had momentarily, gracefully, entered together into the spirit of a blessed house of shared priesthood, a “house of faith, a house of learning, a house of glory, a house of order, a house of God” (D&C 88:119).

That night in a dream I found myself in the small New Mexican town where I grew up. With two friends I approached the high school (scene of many youthful awakenings). In place of the old buildings was a temple, drawing us towards it with great power. We scrambled up the hill, worried that we might miss something, for we knew we were late. Once inside, however, all sense of tardiness vanished. I felt warmly accepted, comfortingly, timelessly enclosed.

Waiting to enter the main room I saw Žarko and Zorca Radacovič, anarchically creative Yugoslavians I met one summer in Germany. Žarko held a huge bottle of wine in his hand and a long loaf of bread under his arm. I was surprised and then filled with delight to see them in a Mormon temple. Žarko drank deeply from the bottle and smiled broadly at me.

Inside a huge, lofty room (I never did see the ceiling), we joined a larger group of people. To one side a drama was being performed. One actor was a man who had insulted me several years before. Now he reached over and gave me a peculiar and warm handshake. Waves of cleansing forgiveness washed through my soul.

Children in the room were singing a happy song and clapping in unison. I could hear a quiet, cerebral jazz improvisation being played on a piano somewhere.

I felt no sense of time or of hurry. We were all in the place we most wanted to be and were settled in for a long stay.

In one corner I found a smooth, white wall with cans of paint at its base. With brilliant hues and lavish strokes I painted enormous poppies on the wall. Around the corner an artist friend decorated another wall with mythical Eastern figures.

All around me people were engaged in animated conversations. I walked among them until I found my family in the center of the room. Michael was tired, but when I carried him around and showed him the paints, the drama, and all the happy people, his spirits lifted.

As the dream drew to an end, I heard two women discussing how they were created in the image of their Heavenly Mother. "I'll see you in the celestial room," one of them said, and the dream ended.

Friday was my last day at the House of the Temple. Amid the rush of making last-minute notes, I happened on a 1917 *History of the Ancient and Honorable Fraternity of Free and Accepted Masons*. In a section on Masonry among nineteenth-century Mormons, after a short, angry description of irregularities in the Nauvoo lodge, the author gives his impression of the pioneers:

In 1846 the Mormon hegira took place, when Nauvoo and other places in Illinois and Camp Far West, and other towns in Missouri were evacuated, and that strange community took its departure from the borders of a land of civilization and enlightenment, to seek an asylum in the Great Basin by the Great Salt Sea of the Deseret.

For a period of nearly twenty years, by alliances with hostile tribes of Indians, and their own armed bands of murderers and marauders, the Danites, they plundered and murdered the emigrants on their way to the Pacific Coast and massacred whole trains of both men and women, and, in successful armed defiance, fortified the national highways to prevent the passage of United States troops over the rightful territory of the government.

Refreshing to see yourself from another point of view!

Late that afternoon I said good-bye to my cousin and boarded a train to Philadelphia. In one hand I carried a briefcase full of scholarly notes; within me I carried the seeds of a more personal essay. Could I, perhaps, in the intimate environment of home, write something about the places I had just visited? About how they relate to my understandings, doubts, loves, and fears? About the spirits I felt in those places?

The sky is quite blue today, not hung so heavily with humid, silver-blue veils. The week since I returned home has been awful. I have lived under the fan. I sleep poorly, and then, too tired to read, I watch movies until I am bored to tears and try sleeping again. I wander through the house, stepping on creaking floor boards, listening to the scuttling dances of cockroaches, to the children softly snoring, and to Elizabeth talking in her sleep.

Though our backyard is minuscule, still we have room for a rose bush, some pole beans, marigolds, a small wading pool for the boys, and a few square feet of grass. Around eight, fire-flies rise and fall, entwined in a glowing rhythm. A neighbor two doors up sits in Bermudas and a pork pie hat and smokes a slow cigar. Pie tins, cut in sections and strung over tomato and pepper plants, wave and jostle in slightest breezes. This sliver of an old Polish working-class island in blighted north Philadelphia has its own pleasures.

Two nights ago I dreamed that all the stars disappeared and the old heavens rolled up like a scroll. Elizabeth and I set out to find a terrestrial place where celestial evidences of new heavens would be manifest.

Today I wash clothes in our broken machine. I beat and stir with a old cane, then hang up garments intercalated with socks, little boys' briefs, and sheets, to dry and flap, whipping in the breeze. I peg them with wooden pins, step back, and see accent marks at scored intervals strung along the taut, bowing line, the line bearing our wraps and linen and sacred wear, bearing marks,

notes — music? If I could only hear it more clearly. It moves against currents so strongly, and its voice is drowned out in quotidian din.

Cities. I think how hard it is for me to find God here. As a child I grew amid archaic, wild landscapes and touched them, raw, vivid with divinity. In the city, layers and layers of peeling veneer seem to have totally obscured the supernatural grain of the earth and the succession of rings around the core of divine years and seasons. So much blight. So much toughness. We abandon the cities again and again to the paradigms of Babylon, Sodom, Gomorrah. Abandon them to the Catholic Church and the AME churches, the Bethel Baptist churches, the Holy Spirit Alliance Tabernacle of Prayer. But now the times of the gentiles in the suburbs is passing and the Church seeks new fields for its husbandry. Will we find God in these cities? What Latter-day Saint will find the interpretive-ministrational key and gift to liberate these captives for God's kingdom? What new paradigm, what vision-alternative do we have?

The temple is a paradox, an earthly home for a transcendent God. It cannot house his glory, yet he bids his children raise its walls, adorn its chambers, weave its veil. For he chooses just this place and not celestial spheres to disclose and veil his presence among the children of Israel. Signs of fellowship and wisdom, signs of sovereignty and orientation hewn upon the temple's sheer face betoken the knowledge and endowment bestowed within. Mortal hands and eyes are led by ones immortal to frame the fearful symmetry of his form, his house, his kingdom here on earth. We cannot place the crown upon his kingdom — cannot bind all wounds, sate all hunger, pacify all violence, wipe away all tears. Yet he bids, he demands a realm of equity and justice, now, from our flawed hearts and feeble hands.

The House of the Lord is the matrix for the kingdom of God on earth. The temple transmutes city and wilderness: it pursues neither Eden, nor the heavenly Jerusalem. It sanctions neither a naive return to a romanticized past, nor the negation of the sensuous present, the real, for an abstract future. Rather, by a mysterious alchemy conjured through the conjunction of words from an improbable rite, it would bridge the rift between parents and children, the whole estranged family of Adam and Eve, and it would establish Enoch's city here, in this world, through unnumbered acts of charity and justice.

It has been months since my visit to two of Washington's temples. I still have not completed my essay on "Aspects of Freemasonry in the Mormon Temple." It seems such an abstraction: the philosophical and historical winnowing out, the surveying and staking of positions. Missing is the living of life, the liturgical power of the temples, the spirit moving through gathered sisters and brothers, the bidden power coursing through a servant of God, and even the groping around in doubts and weariness.

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