

PATIENCE, FAITH, AND THE TEMPLE IN 2019

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My grandfather, Delbert Groberg, was told by his grandmother that a temple would be built in Idaho Falls. In fact, she showed him the land which God had ordained for it. At that time, the LDS Church did not own the property. But Grandpa eventually became a realtor in Idaho Falls and quietly began researching the provenance of the designated land. He sometimes met with owners and negotiated either purchase or donation of the land. My mother was present when the temple's cornerstone was laid in 1940, and again when the temple was dedicated in 1945. She and my dad were married there in 1954, when the endowment ceremony was performed with live actors and included revivalist singing.

I was born the next year, 1955, in Provo, Utah. I remember the 1969 stake conference meeting in which we were asked to donate money towards the building of the Provo Temple. One family donated the money they had been saving for a trip to Disneyland.

The groundbreaking happened on September 15, 1969. Exactly one month later, October 15, 1969, the consequential protest of the Black Fourteen began when Willie Black, president of the Black Student Alliance at the University of Wyoming, proposed a protest against Brigham Young University and the LDS Church's "race policy."

This was our environment in Provo as Herb Albert and Jennifer Warren announced that they would not perform at BYU, and as racist rumors spread throughout the area. It was a fearful, fear-mongering time.

I attended the Provo Temple dedication on February 9, 1972 and was moved by the solemnity of the occasion. The dedicatory prayer

praised God, “the man of holiness” who would make us “unto our God kings and priests.”

Though the prayer was identifiably male, focusing on “priests” without including “priestesses,” and though the 1970s were filled with feminist agitations (including Sonia Johnson’s defiance of patriarchal norms and her subsequent excommunication), these realities did not affect my beliefs. I had my own “Urim and Thummim” (as everyone does) which was my filter and interpreter for all outside events. The framework of my faith was Mormon, and its load-bearing walls were more hymns than dogma. The hymns which most affected my childhood were those which I now have memorized: “I Know that My Redeemer Lives”; “I Am A Child of God”; “Teach Me to Walk in the Light.” Over the years I became aware that there was also a Mother in Heaven, that the name Elohim was plural and that Heavenly Father was surely partnered with Heavenly Mother.

The Latter-day Saint framework was open-ended in many ways. The hymns and scriptures all encouraged imagination, which filmmakers and artists freely used in depicting the Savior, the pre-existence, post-mortal reunions, and mortal intersections with the divine.

When I first entered the Provo Temple to do baptisms for the dead, I was met with a swell of peace. I frankly did not notice the men, but I noticed the women, all in white, all smiling. My eyes filled with tears—something I wasn’t used to at age sixteen. The tears were embarrassing, and I tried to hide them.

Was my response to the temple simply because I had been raised to revere it? Perhaps my upbringing played a part, but my reaction to being inside the building went beyond what cultural expectations could manufacture. My mind, my own vivid imagination opened to the divine.

I was endowed in the Provo Temple in 1979. Its essential vision of mortality as one phase of eternal life was beautiful to me. It was a different endowment ceremony than it would be twelve years later, when significant changes were made. Three new films would debut just a few

years after that, two of which showed women as powerful, insightful, intuitive beings, understanding the necessity of suffering before the dutiful, law-bound men did, recognizing Satanic lies immediately, intuiting the identity of the apostles, dropping their fishing nets (or baskets) instantly when called.

My 1979 endowment was preparatory to my first marriage—a marriage which would fail quickly. I had not learned to identify the signs of misogyny, or conditions like Asperger's. My first husband told me just two weeks after our marriage that I repulsed him. He consistently compared women to cows. He used the word "Woman" like the vilest of epithets. His misogyny was pathological.

I left him after three years. I did what was unthinkable in my family with its long history of long marriages. I filed for divorce. Things I had never thought possible became my reality.

Not long thereafter, I received a letter from the only person in my extended family who had also gotten a divorce—my great Aunt Elaine. Though we didn't know each other well, she had felt an urging to write to me. She said this in her letter:

Dear Margaret:

Many years ago, as I was trying to decide whether to get my divorce, I had a strong sense one night as I was praying of the presence of many of my ancestors, and of their concern for me. There was no attempt by them to make my decision for me. I only sensed their concern.

Last night, as I said my prayers, the same sensation came. I wondered why I would be feeling this, and then I realized I was feeling it for you. There are many—both in this world and in the next—who are deeply concerned over you. They do not wish to usurp your free agency or influence your decision in any way, but they love you very much.

I felt I should tell you that.

Love, Aunt Elaine.

There it was within this letter—my essential Latter-day Saint faith. My framework. I was a part of a world which transcended time and included angels and ancestors. In addition, the message came through a woman, who understood me because of her own experience. All of it felt maternal—my great aunt and perhaps my many grandmothers.

Regardless of the Hell I had just been through, regardless of the unthinkable mistake I had made in my marriage choice, regardless of how thoroughly I condemned myself, I still believed that I was living part of eternity; that I had lived in a place of love before my mortal life; that I would learn vital lessons during mortality and then live afterwards; that I and all men and women—and all institutions they would create—could change and progress, even after behaving stupidly, believing falsehoods, choosing easy fantasies over hard realities. Though I would soon cancel my sealing to my first husband, the temple remained the symbolic convergence of every dimension of my faith.

I was certainly aware of the temple language which made women subservient to their husbands, though it didn't affect me much even when I was married to a man who expressed his anger through misogyny. I understood the scriptural model: that the Church was the bride and Christ the bridegroom. Nonetheless, I was aware enough of the problems inherent in the gender division that when I served as an ordinance worker in the Provo Temple, I chose which words I would emphasize to let the patron know that her primary relationship was with God, and that she was to serve *with* her husband.

When I went to the temple on Wednesday, January 2, 2019, I had heard rumors of changes. I participated in the initiatory and endowment ceremonies. When I heard the first change—one which removed all wording suggesting that a woman must listen to her husband's counsel—my head jerked up to the ordinance worker, my eyes questioning what she had just said. She smiled and nodded. I had Kleenex in my pocket, and brought it out to wipe my tears. It was not a change I had lobbied for, but I was aware that the earlier wording had been painful for

some women, including some of my friends and one of my daughters. I was profoundly grateful for the new words. The gratitude remained as I noted changes throughout the endowment and later in the sealings. I was also deeply affected during the first part of the endowment, when the creation scene showed people of all ethnicities and from many centuries. Oh, I had longed to see diversity in the garden! I still believe that someday, we will see an African cast. That casting will send a message throughout the Church which will be ripple more widely than the Gospel Topics race essay could. A visual testimony that “All are alike unto God” would move us in strides rather than baby steps towards becoming a Zion people.

I also acknowledge the lovely changes I have seen in the Provo Temple’s art over the past forty years. There are some important pieces which show an African American woman from the nineteenth century; Native American children standing close to the Savior; a black man giving a priesthood blessing to his son, perhaps ordaining him to the priesthood. The art also speaks of the LDS trajectory towards unity and equality.

I am convinced that more changes will come to the temple rites. Besides the inevitable casting of multiple ethnicities in the creation story, I believe that the time will come when “the gods” will include The Mother, perfectly placed amidst the raw essence of creativity and the varied blooms in the garden. My imagination easily allows for these possibilities, though my faith insists on patience. Nonetheless, within temple walls, my imagination is generous, forever unfolding, and expectant. I have long believed that I could learn something new every time I attended the temple. Over forty years, that belief has proved true. I have a general assumption that I will experience a miracle every time I’m there, whether the miracle comes as a message to me or whether I am used as a messenger for another. I never expect anything grandiose, but the miracles (as I define them) have been constant.

I recognize, however, that not all have pleasant experiences in the temple. We are not required to love a sanctuary which is evocative and

inspiring for another. When Church lessons rhetorically ask why some of us don't attend the temple often, the standard, anticipated answer is that we don't carve out the time to attend. Generally, we don't deal with the more common reality: that some people simply do not like temple worship, that they find it strange.

Even with the recent changes, the temple will not be universally inspiring. For some, however, it will be a significant refuge and a place of communion with the divine. I speak subjectively and as a woman in her sixties who has loved the temple for all of her life. Acknowledging that my own experience differs from many others', I here share a few of my temple-based memories.

From Guatemala:

Because my father was a Mayanist, we lived in Guatemala during 1975, where Dad taught missionaries how to speak the Mayan dialect Cakchiquel. I returned there six times after our first stay. Through Dad and my own acquaintances in Patsun and Patzicia, I met most of the people who had saved their money for years in order to travel by bus to the Mesa, Arizona Temple in 1966. It was a heroic journey, something which bonded them and created a small community from which church leaders would eventually be chosen. One woman who participated was Rosalia Tum, who told me how impressed she was by the fact that everyone in the temple was dressed the same—Latinos, indigenous people, white people. Nobody appeared richer than anyone else. "There was no difference," she told me in Spanish. Another woman, Josefina Cujcuj, had a warty birthmark around her eye. Though she spoke only Cakchiquel, she agreed to go with me to Guatemala City to see an eye doctor. While we were in the city, Hna. Cujcuj pulled her huipil from her shoulder to show me her garment—gray with age and threadbare. It occurred to me that she had had that garment since her trip to Mesa a decade earlier. The mission president gave her new garments.

From a Mexican Institute Student:

I taught Spanish Institute for ten years and was frequently in awe of my students. One female student, a Mexican returned missionary, told me with some hesitation—not wanting to make sacred things common—about being deathly ill during her teen years. At one point, she felt she was dying. In a dream or a vision, she saw Jesus, who embraced her and called her by a different name. She recovered from the illness and shared her vision sparingly. Years later, when she went through the temple for the first time, she received her new name, which was the same one the Savior had called her by. She was startled and asked that it be repeated. Yes, it was that name. The Lord knew her and knew details about her life which she was yet to discover.

Temple in the Congo:

I have been working in the Democratic Republic of Congo since 2014, going once or twice a year to pursue various initiatives. I have found a deeply vulnerable population in my work center—Lodja. Just sixteen years ago, they were at the end of a long war in which militia from five countries had invaded their village, conscripting child soldiers and committing every inhuman act we know happens in wars. The people were demoralized and traumatized. I heard horror stories and frequently encountered people who did not want to talk about it, saying only, “It was death. Death and more death.”

The temple in Kinshasa, DR-Congo will be dedicated on April 14, 2019. It will be a center of service and a place where people who could not even be ordained to the priesthood or enter a temple prior to 1978 will be trained in all ordinances and asked to serve each other.

I am convinced that the temple will bless the entire Congo. Because I am a Latter-day Saint, believing that God, angels, and our ancestors yearn to comfort, bless, and guide us, I am certain that a new day for the Congo is symbolized more by the temple than by the recent presidential

election there. The “armies of Heaven” bring peace and promise to a place where other armies have brought “death and more death.”

The Kinshasa Temple was announced in 2011. In 2014, I stayed at a hotel next to the temple-site property. No construction had started. Negotiations were ongoing. But, like my grandfather before me, I could look at the expanse of land and imagine something. Architects had not yet presented drawings, and there was conversation over whether it should be a large or a small temple. My imagination could not go into detail, but I knew that the land before me had been chosen and would be sanctified.

In 2017, construction was well underway, and we could see the architect’s vision of what it would become.

In 2018, it was nearly finished. Visitors could not go beyond a certain point, so I had no idea of what the interior looked like. A friend and I went to the site, where I suddenly heard my name called. It was Aime, who embraced and welcomed me.

Aime and I have a long history as friends. He was the companion of one of the missionaries my husband and I served in the Missionary Training Center before they left for the DR-C Kinshasa mission. That missionary requested that I email Aime, as his family didn’t have internet, so he was always on his own when the Americans had time at the internet café.

Thus began my friendship with this remarkable Congolese man who had once been in a revolutionary group—and whose story was the foundation for the film we’re wrapping now, *Heart of Africa*. I even helped him apply to BYU–Hawaii—and he was accepted with a work scholarship. However, a month later, I received a strange email from Aime, indicating that his acceptance had been rescinded. He sent me a copy of the letter, which was almost certainly written without oversight, as it was politically unthinkable. It said that the personnel at BYU-H had decided that Africans did not meet “the cultural expectations” of the university, and he would therefore not be admitted.

My activist impulses were instantly triggered. Within a half hour, I had contacted a few powerful people to assist me in responding. I don't know how much trouble my actions caused, how many conversations and admonitions resulted, but I have no regrets.

Ultimately, Aime was re-admitted to BYU-H, on the condition that he be married. His girlfriend's father thought she was too young to marry, and Aime briefly considered marrying someone else in order to go to the university. But after just one day, he let me know that he loved his girlfriend and would wait for her. He sent a remarkable letter to BYU-H declaring that they had presented him with an impossible choice, and he had elected not to pursue acceptance there but to wait until he could marry his girlfriend, Steffy. That bold move was the very thing which showed Steffy that he truly valued her, that he was willing to put his education on hold.

It's hard to ignore the rejection letter's insulting, presumptuous word choice. That letter was written in 2013. In 2014, Aime married Steffy with her father's full approval and the two were sealed in the Ghana Temple. In 2017, Aime sent me this news:

I am happy to announce to you that I have been appointed to the Kinshasa Temple facility manager position. I will be working for the Temple department. This Job will allow me to visit the temple every week or maybe have my office there. I am so thrilled to start. I will start in July. I will travel to Ghana for two weeks in July, then in Nigeria for other two weeks and in South Africa for another two weeks before going back to Ghana again. I will travel a lot for trainings before the Kinshasa Temple is ready.

On the temple grounds in 2018, Aime said to me, "I know why I didn't go to BYU-Hawaii. The Lord needed me to take care of His house."

Those of us on the outside might rail against the clear injustice Aime suffered when his acceptance was rescinded, but that was not his focus. He had to wait for his wife. He had to wait for his education (he now has a degree from a university in Kinshasa which is partnered with

Beulah Heights University in Atlanta, Georgia). He had to wait for the temple. Patience and faith were and are his watchwords.

I will be with Aime and Steffy in Kinshasa for the temple dedication. I have seen the waving of palms several times when guests were welcomed into a Congolese village. Palm waving there is not calm. The smiles, the dancing, the spontaneous singing, the irresistible rejoicing is glorious. I wonder if the Hosanna Shout will be a bit different in Kinshasa than it is in the USA. Regardless, I plan on singing and shouting with my friends and with the armies of Heaven as the temple is given to God.