

THE PRODIGAL'S RETURN TO THE FATHER: *HOUSE OF GLORY AND REDISCOVERY*

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Review of S. Michael Wilcox. *House of Glory: Finding Personal Meaning in the Temple*, 1995. Salt Lake City: Deseret Book. 146 pp. with bibliography and index. \$14.99 (paperback).

Abstract: The temple of God is a new experience with any visit, but its wonders are nigh astonishing to someone who has lost the privilege for a long time. Wilcox's House of Glory is more than a guidebook to the House of God, it is a camera panning from the physical (such as the meanings of symbols and the appearances in and outside of temples) to the intensely personal (like the requirements and rewards of temple work, its ancient history, its powers of protection, and so on). Essentially a book for the experienced temple goer (one no longer stunned by the newness of it all), Wilcox's prize-winning book fills in the blank spaces and answers questions. And awes the Prodigal Son.

*H*ouse of Glory: Finding Personal Meaning in the Temple is a book S. Michael Wilcox wrote in only eight days, a book building inside him after many lectures on the subject. It won the 1996 Frankie and John Kenneth Orton Award for Latter-day Saint (LDS) Literature.¹ A best seller, it comes trailing clouds of reader approval, but at only 146 pages, is it “a lot about a little” or “a little about a lot”?

As a prodigal member of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, my reading of *House of Glory* was a matter of recovering information atrophied away — if I ever knew it at all — not a reading for exegesis or apologist counterargument. The book's title itself implies therapeutic words rather than doctrinal fiat and makes clear the focus is arm-around-the-shoulder, not voice-from-the-lectern. It deals with symbols in learning and the endowment, with the processes of pondering

1 Jerry Johnston, “House of Glory’ Wins LDS Writing Award,” Deseret News (15 September 1996), <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/513295/HOUSE-OF-GLORY-WINS-LDS-WRITING-AWARD.html?pg=all>, accessed 14 Feb. 2015.

and understanding, with solving problems, with refuge from the world, and of course with proxy work for the dead.

Essentially, Wilcox's thesis is the subtitle of the book: "Finding Personal Meaning in the Temple." Through seeking to understand the symbolism in the temple, forging and polishing new attitudes, and the conclusion that the temple truly is the center of our universe (to use Joseph Smith's words, the temple is "this most glorious of all subjects belonging to the everlasting Gospel"), one can discover eternal meanings that resolve contradictions in life.

A Book of Discoveries

House of Glory is a book worth reading in that it is not assimilated in a single exposure. "The temple ordinances, like the scriptures, are worth thousands of readings, and even then we shall not have sounded the depths of their possibilities."³ I found one eyebrow-raiser after another (but then, to the recalcitrant, everything about the Iron Rod is unfamiliar — even amazing). For example, "We have been promised that in the temple, if we are 'pure in heart,' we 'shall see God.'" (Doctrine & Covenants [D&C] 97:16.) There are many ways of seeing, and some of the most profound do not require our natural eyes."⁴

My (and I think "the usual") understanding is that we must be transfigured to "see God," as was Moses, Enoch, *et al.*, but indeed Joseph Smith explained that "All things ... God ... has seen fit ... to reveal to us ... are revealed to us in the abstract and independent of affinity of this mortal tabernacle but are revealed to our spirits precisely as though we had no bodies at all."⁵

The inference is that in the temple, the abode of God, we may perceive the presence of God and "see" Him through spiritual experiences and insights. As Hyrum L. Andrus wrote:⁶

Joseph Smith held that a true understanding of the nature of Deity must be firmly rooted in the central fact that God

² D&C 128:17.

³ Wilcox, S. M., *House of Glory*, SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1995, 39, hereafter *HofG*.

⁴ *HofG*, 124.

⁵ J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, ed. Joseph Fielding Smith, 7 April 1844, SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1969, 355; cf. Job 19:25-26: "yet in my flesh shall I see God."

⁶ Andrus, Hyrum L. *God, Man, and the Universe*. SLC, UT: Bookcraft, 1968, 110-111.

is a distinct, tangible being with a corporeal body similar in form and stature to that which man possesses. "There is no other God in heaven but that God who has flesh and bones," he declared.⁷ Of the form and stature of God, he explained: "If the veil were rent today, and the great God who holds this world in its orbit, and who upholds all worlds and all things by his power, was to make himself visible, ... you would see him like a man in form — like yourselves in all the person, image, and very form of a man."⁸ According to the Prophet, man is a theomorphic being, in that he possesses a physical body that is formed in the very likeness and image of God.⁹ Though God, like man, is a corporeal being, He is free from the corrupt elements that are associated with man's physical body, by which the latter is subject to the many weaknesses and deficiencies of mortal existence. God's body of flesh and bones is spiritual and immortal in its organization, whereas man's body is temporal and mortal. God is perfect in all His bodily attributes and powers, while man is imperfect in his physical being. And God is a divine being, but man in his natural, mortal state possesses only limited characteristics of divinity.

With our limited characteristics of divinity, we are incapable of perceiving sound frequencies dogs can hear¹⁰ or color wavelengths familiar to bees.¹¹ We have not the skin sensitivities of sharks, which can

7 J. Smith, Jr., *Teachings*, 181.

8 *ibid.*, 345.

9 J. Smith, Jr. 1902-1932. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Documentary History)*. 7 vols. SLC, UT: Deseret Book, 1978, 6:305.

10 "Dogs hear at a wider range of frequencies than humans. The low end of the range is similar to humans (humans hear down to about 20 Hertz, or cycles per second, dogs are at about 40 Hz). But at the high end, they are quite different. Humans hear to about 23 KHz or 23,000 Hz (kilohertz = 1000 x Hz) but dogs can hear up to 45 KHz!" <http://scienceline.ucsb.edu/getkey.php?key=596>, accessed 13 Mar. 2015.

11 "Humans are trichromats, meaning that we experience color through three types of photoreceptors tuned to different wavelengths: short (blue), medium (green), and long (red); and the combinations of activity of these receptors give us the perception of color. However, it turns out that the tuning curve of the red receptor in bees is shifted up such that they are red-blind, but see ultraviolet light. This means that UV light is their version of red (try to imagine). That change in color gives nature another way to evolve its marketing campaign and attract

detect minute electrical discharges from prey in the water.¹² Not only that, biologists once thought humans use only ten percent of their brains (actually, now the consensus is 100%),¹³ but even so the difference between an earthly and a heavenly body and brain is infinite. Nonetheless, as children of a Heavenly Father, a human being has an innate, infinite capacity for improvement and development. In the temple, these powers are suggested and in some cases touched upon.

“The true teaching in the temple is not group instruction.”¹⁴ With this point of view, one’s attitude changes from sauntering into the classroom to absorb another lecture, to preparing for a one-to-one with a professor who will know how much (or little) one has prepared — and He will ask the most telling questions.

This also corresponds with the required, “You must ask.” Modern society leads us (unfortunately so easily) into a concept of entitlement, a posture of victimization, and the unfair, “if you really loved me, you would (whatever) ... I shouldn’t have to ask.”

more business. For instance, flowers have evolved to provide bright UV petals surrounding a dark region contrasting containing glowing UV pollen. Although we can't see it, bees must find this irresistible!” http://www.nature.com/scitable/blog/the-artful-brain/alternate_realities, accessed 13 Mar. 2015.

12 “Sharks may be more sensitive to electric fields than any other animal, with a threshold of sensitivity as low as 5 nV/cm. That is 5/1,000,000,000 of a volt measured in a centimeter-long ampulla. Since all living creatures produce an electrical field by muscle contractions, it is easy to imagine that a shark, such as the lemon shark of the family Carcharhinidae, may pick up weak electrical stimuli from the muscle contractions of animals, particularly prey. On the other hand, the electrochemical fields generated by paralyzed prey were sufficient to elicit a feeding attack from sharks and rays in experimental tanks; therefore muscle contractions are not necessary to attract the animals. Sharks and rays can locate prey buried in the sand, or DC electric dipoles that simulate the main feature of the electric field of a prey buried in the sand.” (“Ampullae of Lorenzini,” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ampullae_of_Lorenzini, accessed 13 Mar. 2015).

13 “Although it’s true that at any given moment all of the brain’s regions are not concurrently firing, brain researchers using imaging technology have shown that, like the body’s muscles, most are continually active over a 24-hour period. ‘Evidence would show over a day you use 100 percent of the brain,’ says John Henley, a neurologist at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minn. Even in sleep, areas such as the frontal cortex, which controls things like higher level thinking and self-awareness, or the somatosensory areas, which help people sense their surroundings, are active, Henley explains.” <http://www.scientificamerican.com/article/do-people-only-use-10-percent-of-their-brains/>, accessed 13 Mar. 2015.

14 *HofG*, 12.

“Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you” (Matthew 7:7). On one hand, this seems so simple — ask and ye shall receive. On the other, to ask for help is to relinquish command, to admit frailty, to become humble — this is not so simple. To enter the temple with open heart, open mind, and meek attitude puts the temple experience into a process of change on many levels.

Symbols

Books have been written about the temple's symbols, and indeed, as I recognized one, the “circle in the square” motif in the interior moldings, I congratulated myself. In reference to the symbol of the circle in the square:

In a temple context, these symbols establish the building “as the center, with the world tree at its axis, uniting the three main levels of the universe and sanctifying the four world regions.”¹⁵ A succinct list of examples from Nibley evidences the ubiquity of the symbol of the circle and the square in ancient design: “The Roman *quadrata* represents the four corners of the earth, and the center of everything... But it's also the picture of a wheel. The Babylonians combined the two very neatly in their cosmic design. It's the wheel that goes round and round but never moves ... It represents the dome of the heavens, and you find it everywhere as the common shape of churches. And the square church accompanies it [e.g., as in the common form of the basilica of the Roman Catholic Church].¹⁶

But then, *what am I to make of that symbol?* In all honesty, precisely that design can be seen in many Victorian, Art Nouveau, antebellum, and neo-colonial houses, and the interior designers were unlikely to have had earth, sky, and the universe in mind — they just wanted a design fillip to decorate a drawer-pull. On the other hand, the circle in the square has well-known links to Freemasonry¹⁷ (which was, in

15 J. M. Lundquist, *The Temple: Meeting Place of Heaven and Earth* (Art and Imagination), 16; 1993, Thames & Hudson, London.

16 H. W. Nibley, “The Early Christian Prayer Circle,” 144, 1978, *Brigham Young University Studies* 19: 144.

17 “The Square and Compasses (or, more correctly, a square and a set of compasses joined together) is the single most identifiable symbol of Freemasonry.

turn, lifted from earlier usages)¹⁸ but perhaps a consideration even more powerful is that when one learns *God's* meaning in these symbols, to see them in secular situations is to see a "secret message from God," a world-outside reminder that All belongs to the Lord. Perhaps God's meaning in the circle and square is a subtle reminder of heavenly influence in every balustrade and bannister.

Even *not* understanding the symbols is a blessing of sorts: "The symbols are different so we will not become so accustomed to seeing them that we cease asking the questions. If you are puzzled by the symbols of the temple, perhaps that is as it should be. It is all right to keep on puzzling over them and pondering them and studying them, allowing the Spirit to reveal their power one by one."¹⁹

Another eye-opener:

The temple endowment is scripture, the highest form of scripture, not written down for all to read and see but engraved in the minds of those whose efforts and attendance show the depth of their desires. It is written on our hearts, not in the pages of a book. Occasionally we read of people who are shown truths or are taught principles they are forbidden to reveal or write down. Jesus prayed with the Nephites, for example, and 'the things which he prayed cannot be written.' (3 Nephi 17:15). The moment was too sacred, too holy and profoundly beautiful to commit to paper. As an English major, I used to wish I could see or hear something so wonderful it could not

Both the square and compasses are architect's tools and are used in Masonic ritual as emblems to teach symbolic lessons. Some Lodges and rituals explain these symbols as lessons in conduct: for example, Duncan's *Masonic Monitor* of 1866 explains them as: "The square, to square our actions; The compasses, to circumscribe and keep us within bounds with all mankind".^[1] However, as Freemasonry is non-dogmatic, there is no general interpretation for these symbols (or any Masonic symbol) that is used by Freemasonry as a whole" (Peter Gilkes, "Masonic ritual: Spoilt for choice," *Masonic Quarterly Magazine*, July 2004, 10. Retrieved May 7, 2007 by Wikipedia, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Square_and_Compasses, accessed April 9, 2015).

18 "[The Square and Compass] is ... from about 3200 BCE, but probably even earlier, more than two thousand years before." Donald H.B. Falconer, *The Square and Compasses*, Volume 2, 20; <http://pictoumasons.org/library/Falconer%20Don%20~%20The%20Square%20And%20Compasses%20-%20Volume%202%20%5Bpdf%5D.pdf>, accessed April 9, 2015.

19 HofG, 14.

be written. Then, one day, the Spirit whispered, "You have, many times, in the Lord's house."²⁰

Continuing the idea of heavenly symbols everywhere, "An excellent example is the book of Exodus. In a way, it is a Mosaic endowment. It is a small microcosm of life, just as the endowment is a microcosm of life. Almost everything that happens in it, from the freeing of the children of Israel to their entry into the promised land, can be symbolically applied to our own lives."²¹ For example, (1) The Children of Israel moved on when the cloud or the pillar of fire was taken up from above the tabernacle. "In our own lives, we must never journey without the direction of the Spirit."²² (2) "Moses tells us in Deuteronomy that the manna symbolized the word of God. (See Deuteronomy 8:3.) Should we not gather the words of God from the scriptures 'every day'?"²³ (3) The secular world: "During their wanderings in the wilderness, Israel frequently desired to return to the 'fleshpots' of Egypt. Egypt suggests the captivity and restraining power of the world and the adversary. Do we not also struggle to remain separate from the world, to feast continually on the manna of the Lord's word and not the 'fleshpots' of worldly entertainments and appetites?"²⁴

"Pondering" is deep concentration of thought and focus, most often appearing in cramming for exams or trying to be objective about choosing between a Volkswagen or a Corvette. But in following threads of logic and inspiration regarding temple things, "We can do this [pondering] with the temple ordinances only if they are written in our minds and in our hearts, for we cannot study them on a printed page. ... At times, while listening to the endowment, we may want to pause and reflect about some insight we are discovering. We wish we could stop the session from continuing so we could reflect a little deeper ... Of course, we can neither write ourselves notes nor stop the session. ... We are told to pray for understanding."²⁵

Protection

The temple is also a place of refuge. "Sometimes the truths we learn in the temple are not taught through symbols. Often they come through the

20 *HofG*, 20.

21 *HofG*, 22.

22 *HofG*, 23.

23 *HofG*, 23.

24 *HofG*, 24.

25 *HofG*, 29.

whisperings of the Spirit because our souls have been calmed through the serenity of the Lord's house. We cry out to the Lord in our anxiety, but most frequently he answers us when our minds and hearts are quiet."²⁶

Every father since the invention of dance bands has told his teenaged children their music is nothing but noise, and as that appraisal is passed from generation to generation, a greater significance becomes apparent: the world indeed is getting worse. But how can that be? We have modern media that place the standard works in the hands of anyone who has a telephone. We have construction methods and international communications that have temples built all over the world. We have an international infrastructure that has turned earth into a global village. But Satan is also active in the earth. Wars (and rumors of wars) have not grown less frequent since World War I, the War to End All Wars.

Except for the brief blip between Vietnam and Grenada, there has not been a time since the Korean War that members of the US military have had no possibility of being sent to a war zone. America itself, once too far away and too well guarded, is now not only involved in endless foreign military commitments but also subject to terrorism and threats from abroad.

Where to flee from the wrath to come? Flee unto Zion, of course, but whereas that once meant the valleys of Utah, now the interpretation is "the stakes of Zion," meaning one's homeland and home congregation — and ultimately one's family home. But temples themselves are a powerful protection. "... the Spirit simply whispered, 'This is the sacrifice I ask of you. Be in this house *frequently, constantly, and consistently*, and the promised protection you seek, which this house has the power to bestow, will be extended to those you love.'"²⁷ According to Pres. Ezra Taft Benson, "This temple will be a standing witness that the power of God can *stay the powers of evil in our midst*. Many parents, in and out of the Church, are concerned about protection against a cascading avalanche of wickedness which threatens to engulf Christian principles. ... There is a power associated with the ordinances of heaven — even the power of godliness — which can and will *thwart the forces of evil* if we will be worthy of those sacred blessings. This community will be protected, our families will be protected, *our children will be safeguarded* as we live the gospel, visit the temple, and live close to the Lord."²⁸

26 HofG, 37.

27 HofG, 47.

28 Ezra Taft Benson, 2014, *The Teachings of Ezra Taft Benson*, 256; SLC, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; emphasis added.

“According to the midrash, Sodom itself could have been a place of safety had there been a circle of as few as ten righteous individuals in the city to ‘pray on behalf of all of them.’”²⁹

“In the last days each ‘dwelling place’ will have the promised protection if we are worthy of it through faithfulness to our covenants. If we have the eyes to see, we can stand in front of our homes and know that, spiritually speaking, the Lord’s glory, his pillar, is above them and will defend them. This is also true of our wards and stakes.”³⁰

What if it is *our* responsibility to live righteously enough that our prayers might save our own cities? Wilford Woodruff said, “Ye sons of men, I say unto you, in the name of Israel’s God, those very principles that God has revealed are what have stayed the judgments of the Almighty on the earth. Were it not for these principles, you and I would not be here today.”³¹

In the days of Hezekiah, King of Judah, Sennacherib, King of Assyria, brought his army, the most powerful on earth, to conquer Judah, as had already been done to Samaria.

But the people, renewed by their worship and the example of Hezekiah, ‘held their peace’ and waited for the Lord’s deliverance (2 Kings 18:36). When Hezekiah heard the words of the Assyrian messenger and knew there was no logical way he could hold out against the might of the Assyrian army, he ‘went into the House of the Lord’ and there offered a deeply touching prayer in behalf of his people. The Lord responded by assuring Hezekiah that the Assyrians would not ‘shoot an arrow’ against the city. That night ‘the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand. ... So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed’ (2 Kings 19:1, 32, 35-36).³²

That is sobering — 185,000 Assyrian dead in one night without a single loss on the Judean side. If all scripture is for our benefit and can be applied to our problems, what can be expected today? “The sobering lesson of Hezekiah’s day is being repeated. For the Saints who come

29 Jeffrey R. Bradshaw, et al., *Ancient Temple Worship*, 2014, SLC, UT: Eborn Books Pubs., 93.

30 *HofG*, 57.

31 Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff*, 1995, SLC, UT: Bookcraft Pubs., 154.

32 *HofG*, 64.

to the sanctuary, the Lord's miraculous deliverance from sometimes overwhelming odds and forces can also be expected. Might we also not have reason to hope that the enemy will not 'shoot an arrow' to strike at the foundations of our families?"³³

The Iron Rod

(As an aside) one of the tenets of Alcoholics Anonymous is that no one is perfect, anybody can slip — fall off the wagon — but success is in keeping on the path of recovery, to "Keep coming back!" The influence of God dwells in all good on the earth (the Gospel of Jesus Christ was an inspiration for and is an unmentioned part of the Alcoholics Anonymous program). The message is the same:

We may not be perfect in obeying our covenants, but we must make a steady effort to be true. Nobody 'lives up to his ideals,' Heber J. Grant said, 'but if we are striving, if we are working, if we are trying, to the best of our ability, to improve day by day, then we are in the line of our duty. If we are seeking to remedy our own defects, if we are so living that we can ask God for light, for knowledge, for intelligence and above all for His spirit, that we may overcome our weaknesses, then, I can tell you, we are in the straight and narrow path that leads to life eternal; then we need have no fear.'³⁴

Proxy Work for the Dead

The "dead" are more a part of our lives today than in the past — think about it: many of them joined the Church before we did and now are eager for us to play our parts for their salvation. Elder Melvin J. Ballard taught: "Why is it that sometimes only one of a city or household receives the Gospel? It was made known to me that it is because the righteous dead who have received the Gospel in the spirit world are exercising themselves, and in answers to their prayers elders of the Church are sent to the homes of their posterity ..., and that descendant in the flesh is then privileged to do the work for his dead kindred."³⁵ Elder David B. Haight agreed: "I believe that when you diligently seek after your

33 HofG, 65.

34 *Conference Report*, April 1909, 111; in HofG, 79.

35 Melvin J. Ballard, *Crusader for Righteousness*, 219; 1966, Bookcraft Pubs.: SLC, UT.

ancestors — in faith — needed information will come to you *even when no mortal records of their lives are available*.³⁶

The importance of temple work cannot be exaggerated. “[The] coming forth [of modern labor-saving inventions] in such rapid succession in the latter days was not an accident and was not accomplished without the inspiration and direction of the Lord.”³⁷ Modern technology is an expertise growing exponentially — to the bad as well as the good.

Today, genealogy ranks second only to porn as the most searched topic online. According to a January 2012 report by market research firm Global Industry Analysts, an estimated 84 million people around the world spend anywhere from \$1,000 to \$18,000 a year in search of their ancestors ... It’s a demographic projected to grow 36 percent by 2020, three times as fast as any other group.³⁸

Conclusion

S. Michael Wilcox created a valuable little book. It is certainly “a lot about a little” — that “little” being a close focus on the subject of the temple, and “a lot” of insights and confirming retellings. I loved this book. I will keep it forever. I recommend it to anyone. It keeps me “coming back.”

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36 Conference Report, *Ensign*, May 1993, 25. Emphasis added.

37 *HofG*, 117.

38 Bruce Falconer, “Ancestry.com’s Genealogical Juggernaut,” Bloomberg Business Online, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2012-09-20/ancestry-dot-coms-genealogical-juggernaut>, accessed April 9, 2015.

