

THE NAUVOO TEMPLE: A SYMBOL OF WHOLENESS

By Maxine Hanks

MORMONISM'S NAUVOO PERIOD was a manic time when the many influences on Joseph Smith's mind culminated in dynamic religious innovation, ranging from mysticism to Masonry to polygamy. The Nauvoo Temple became the climactic embodiment of this intense medley. This temple, like the young church it represented, was an unusual fusion of diverse traditions from the old world and the new.

This early Mormon amalgam was energetic, untempered and rugged, struggling for balance and unable to find it—except in the construction of this stone temple. The Nauvoo Temple was Joseph's way of bringing his vision into solid form. Only a temple could solidify a revolutionary theology and signify a radical new religious tradition. Standing three stories high, with thirty pilasters, a three-tiered tower, and a flying angel adorning the edifice—surely such a stone structure and its meaning could survive.

Unfortunately, this extraordinary temple lasted less than a decade—commenced in 1841, dedicated in 1846, then destroyed by fire in 1848 and by tornado in 1850. However, the Nauvoo Temple has risen again today, and we can see its sunstones with our own eyes. As this temple reemerges, inviting us to reconsider Mormon origins, what omens does it hold? Our memory of early Mormonism has returned in a postmodern form, appearing as an anachronism. Yet perhaps it offers the same meaning as before—a synthesis of diversity and dualities, a metaphor of wholeness. This temple's syncretic design and life-death cycle may contain a wisdom beyond what is obvious.

DUALITY AND DYAD

THE Nauvoo Temple illustrated a collaboration of two very different minds—the prophet Joseph Smith and architect William Weeks. Joseph felt

compelled to materialize the heavenly world as much as humanly possible and as rapidly as feasible. And Weeks captured Joseph's celestial views in architecture and stone. The Nauvoo Temple was a system of symbols that perhaps we have never yet fully understood. Each symbol is part of a system or larger cosmology. Even a simple duality or dyad of two complimentary symbols can constitute a greater wholeness.

One way to access the totality of this complex temple is to consider its central duality, which expresses the dual nature of existence—physical and spiritual. Perhaps the most basic symbol of duality is the timeless dyad of sun and moon, easily seen in the Nauvoo Temple's pairing of sunstone and moonstone. The enigmatic sunstone of the Nauvoo Temple held a position of prominence in the architecture of a new religion. But what of the moonstone—the pedestal upon which other stones rested? The sunstone and moonstone were linked together as pedestal and capital of one pilaster, making a balanced construction, one integral whole.

The sunstone is a Mormon icon, a symbol of theological mystery, and a logo for open inquiry in Mormon studies. Yet we shouldn't forget its companion the moonstone, nor the temple's larger cosmology. What can we learn from these symbols of duality and cosmology? Can the Nauvoo Temple tell us more about our religion and ourselves?

SUN, MOON, AND STARS

EARLY Mormonism developed an iconography based on celestial symbols. What was Joseph Smith's inspiration for this symbology? Joseph borrowed from many sources as diverse as almanacs, astrology, scripture, Masonry, and patriotism, focusing primarily on the most universal symbols of sun, moon, and stars. Mormon symbolism really arrives in the Nauvoo period.¹ The temple mainly depicted symbols

of heaven, signifying God's divine presence in our midst.

The importance of the sun, moon, and star in Mormon theology is seen in the placement and design of the sunstone, moonstone, and starstone. The sun and moon are linked together as implied pillars of the temple, while the stars reside above on a frieze around the entablature or in rows on the tower, like narrow strips of night sky. Joseph equated the sun, moon, and stars to the three degrees of heavenly glory. Yet he also equated sun and moon to the masculine and feminine. "General Law asked why the sun was called by a masculine name and the moon by a feminine one. I replied that the root of masculine is stronger, and of the feminine weaker. The sun is a governing planet to certain planets, while the moon borrows her light from the sun."²

The sunstone had an animated face brooding over clouds or waves, uniting fire and water. The prominence and elaborate nature of the sunstone makes the moonstone pale by comparison, like a silent partner. Yet the moonstone provided a foundational base.

The moonstone was simple and serene because a pedestal is usually plain. The placement of a crescent moon onto the temple pedestal was an inventive use of space; it fit into place by laying flat, horizontal or prone, face down. The moon's face is only a faint outline with smiling lips, nose, and eye. Yet elsewhere (such as the skylight of the celestial room) the moon is depicted in all its phases, signifying completion.

The star is inanimate and appears in various ways: as a three-dimensional starstone, a carved relief, and a stained-glass pentagram. This symbol of the "morning star" points down to the sun. The five-pointed star and the pentagram, either inverted or upright, were common architectural decorations in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, as well as symbols of truth, freedom, or power.

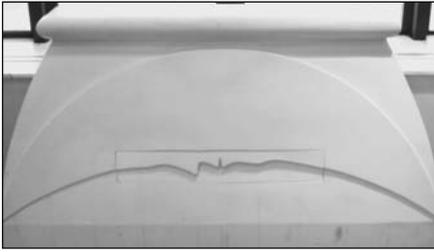
BALANCE, INTEGRATION, WHOLENESS

THE Nauvoo Temple not only integrated diverse elements and symbols; it also united Mormons themselves. It was here that men and women were joined in rituals. And here, Mormonism formally integrated women into the religion as partners with men. The Nauvoo period and its temple established the two genders as a partnership, in church and in stone. Even the setting of the moonstones seems to have coincided with this developing gender partnership.

Workers began setting the moonstone pedestals into place in 1842, while the wom-



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Moonstone replica, Museum of Church History and Art, Salt Lake City, Utah

en's Relief Society was being established as a parallel to male fraternity or "kingdom of priests." The moonstones were finally set in early 1843, the same year the prophet brought women into the Holy Order of Melchizedek Priesthood, the "anointed quorum" or endowment. Both the female society and women's induction into a priesthood order defied contemporary Masonic and Christian practices, which excluded women from most religious orders or societies. And both the women's society and the female endowment established Mormon women as parallel partners with men in the religion.

The sunstones were set into place by the end of 1844, after which full endowment sessions finally began in December 1845. Thus, as the pilasters of the temple were joining moonstone pedestals and sunstone capitals, the church began joining women and men. And temple rites of initiation, endowment, sealing, marriage, and second anointings made women partners with men. The religion with its dual-gender structure was well established by the time the Nauvoo Temple was dedicated in May 1846.

DECONSTRUCTION, RECONSTRUCTION

THE Nauvoo Temple was an extraordinary example of artistic and symbolic architecture which unfortunately didn't last long. Yet its destruction might also be seen as a metaphor of change. If we view the life of the Nauvoo Temple as a trilogy of construction, destruction, and reconstruction, or perhaps thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, it can help us see a more holistic perspective of our religion. Destruction (as well as deconstruction) helps us see that it is often necessary to dismantle old structures. Reconstruction helps us see that old structures can be reinterpreted to find wholeness.

The rebuilt Nauvoo Temple now offers us an opportunity to revisit our radical beginnings. Could it be that this rebuilding is an unconscious attempt to recapture the syn-

thesis Joseph was working to create? Not since the Nauvoo period has the LDS Church tried to embody the divergent spiritual systems that Joseph had been absorbing and integrating in himself and his religion. Today's Mormonism is truly diverse, with liberals and conservatives, fundamentalists and feminists, orthodox thinkers and heretics, pragmatists and mystics. Even though the Church institution identifies with conservatism, it seems the larger canopy of Mormonism cannot escape the unorthodox synergy Joseph tried to incorporate.

The original Nauvoo Temple was heretical compared to the conformity and corporate blandness of today's Church. And can we ignore the reappearance of the sunstone, still associated with heresy, on the exterior of an edifice intended for orthodox, temple-attending Mormons? Is the rebuilt Nauvoo Temple a symbol of orthodoxy or heterodoxy? Exclusion or inclusion? Perhaps the Nauvoo Temple has always urged us to transcend dichotomies, embrace dualities, incorporate diversity, own our wholeness. After all, a temple represents the human reach toward the divine. ☞

NOTES

1. See Allen D. Roberts, "Where Are the All-Seeing Eyes?", *SUNSTONE* 4 (May/June 1979): 30.
2. Joseph Smith, *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1978), 5:210–11.

A SUNSTONE UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL

THERE IS NO experience quite like standing face to face with an original sunstone. Never underestimate the effect of a 2000-pound, five-foot-high icon right in front of you. As restful as a Buddha, this great stone face stares back with a gentle and perplexed expression. The face has a profound effect on the subconscious mind. It triggers something deep in the human psyche, or perhaps even deeper in our DNA. It provokes an inner knowing, unconscious yet visceral. Something familiar in the look of this face emerges in our own being in a place where matter and quantum meet, producing a most curious feeling.

The sunstone face is at once primal and divine, simultaneously primordial and evolved, impish and angelic. The face unites a most primitive look with a most enlightened expression—a strangely paradoxical image. Perhaps it captures the visage of early Mormon credulity. Or maybe it is a Mormon Sphinx—animal and human, mortal and supernal. Perhaps it is a religious chimera, or a barbaric American gothic image, or a masculine Medusa turned to stone. This incongruous face does not destroy, but it will undo you, remake your consciousness. When we dare gaze into our own strange or forgotten face, it may change us for the better.

One symbol can invigorate our psyches, lives, and culture. And one symbol leads to another. I turned my gaze to an original moonstone, weathered, but unbroken. As I stood on a level with the face-down moon and fastened upon the faint outline of its crescent face, it stirred within me a longing for completion, a solar partner, a sense of wholeness.

SUN/MOON DYAD IN OTHER TRADITIONS

HERMETICISM: The hermetic tradition uses the sun and moon as symbols of the dual nature of human existence—two opposite natures that seek resolution or harmony via a mysterious marriage. "Hermes imagines man as a microcosm. All that the macrocosm contains, he also contains. . . . The macrocosm has sun and moon; man has two eyes, and the right eye is related to the sun, the left eye to the moon. . . . This then is what they call the Cosmic Image."

ALCHEMY: Alchemy unites the sun and moon as a duality that is transformative. One symbol of this duality is the "ouroboros," or serpent eating its own tail, consuming and generating itself in an eternal dynamic of birth and death. "To signify eternity [Aion] they draw the Sun and Moon because they are eternal elements. But when they want to represent Eternity differently, they draw a Serpent with his tail hidden by the rest of the body."

KABBALAH: Both the Nauvoo and Salt Lake Temples use an implied pillar with a moon, then sun above, then star. An earth is added below the moon on the Salt Lake Temple. This earth-moon-sun-star arrangement resembles the Kabbalah—a map of being that connects humankind on earth to God on high. The middle pillar of Kabbalah places earth at the bottom, then the moon with the sun above as intermediary spheres, and the crown of God at the top.

ASTROLOGY: In astrology, the sun denotes the ego or identity, while the moon denotes the emotions or subconscious. Sun and moon aspects represent two primary features of the personality. If sun and moon are in opposition, they indicate a powerful tension or counterbalance, but if they are conjunct, they indicate a harmony or balance. The pilaster of the Nauvoo Temple unites sun and moon as a pair, perhaps in counterbalance or in conjunction.