

*“A home place is as vital and necessary as the beating of your own heart. . . .
If you do not have a home place, very little will ever . . . really belong to you in the world.”*

A PLACE CALLED LITTLE UTAH

By H. Parker Blount

“What is man,’ said Athos, ‘who has no landscape? Nothing but mirrors and tides.’”¹

THE COASTAL PLAINS OF GEORGIA EMERGED, eons ago, from the receding waters of the Atlantic Ocean. It is a landscape of sandy soil often as fine as sea salt, cypress swamps of tea-colored water, rivers snaking their way to the ocean, and savannahs of scrub oak and yellow pine, now dotted with farms. It is a beautiful place, but a tropical paradise it is not. Gothic shapes emerge from its nature as effortlessly as water moccasins glide among the cypress knees of the misty swamp. Summer days linger, with temperature and humidity hovering at nearly the same level. Insects are legion. It is a geography and climate that is not timid in molding the lives of its inhabitants.

That was the landscape of my youth. I grew up like most South Georgia boys of my day—barefoot all summer, in and out of the creeks and rivers, swimming and fishing, working in the fields for money for school clothes. We went to fish fries and barbeques, and on Saturdays, we went to the movies (or, as we called it, “the show”). Most of us went to church. There is where my life differed from that of my friends: I was a Mormon.

In the South, one is first and foremost a Southerner. Being a Southerner isn’t something one consciously constructs; it’s rather the byproduct of the way geography shapes culture. But in the LDS Church, one is first and foremost a Mormon. In our little congregation, our allegiance and loyalty was to the LDS Church, but we could no more escape being Southerners than the coastal rivers can escape the rise and fall of the tides. One can choose to be Mormon; one cannot choose not to be a Southerner. But growing up in the ’50s, I didn’t realize that by choosing to be Mormon, we would, in time, have our indige-

nous Southern culture supplanted by a stronger Utah Mormon culture.

Our little congregation emerged on the Coastal Plains landscape on 9 January 1905, when Morning Parker Davis was baptized along with her daughter, son-in-law, and three others. They formed the nucleus of a group of Church members that officially was known as the Satilla Branch, named after the river that flowed nearby and which served as the baptismal font for many years. In time, the Satilla Branch became the Axson Ward of the Jacksonville Stake (the first stake organized in the South). But among locals—members and nonmembers alike—our branch was known as “Little Utah,” “Utah Church,” or simply “Utah.”

In the rural South, all churches, regardless of the denomination, had names much like the one ours took on. One didn’t just attend the Baptist Church, for example; one belonged to Pisgah, or Mt. Zion, or Bushy Creek. Thus, Satilla Branch was Little Utah, and the Douglas Branch, some twenty miles away, was Cumorah. Though the doctrine was LDS, in many respects Little Utah was just another Southern country church. It was shaped by the same forces of geography that shaped the others. And its story, like those of other denominations, is the story of a place and the interaction of that place and its people. It is primarily a story of belonging. But the biography of Little Utah is also the story of the loss of place in the modern LDS Church.

SOUTHERN WAYS

TO UNDERSTAND THE story of Little Utah, one must understand something about the South. People are not entirely wrong when they say that North, East, and West are directions, while South is a place. And in the South, place is crucial. One indicator of that importance is the concept of “home place.” In his, *A Childhood: A Biography of a Place*, Harry Crews writes, “I come from people who believe the home place is as vital and necessary as the beating of your own heart.” He continues, “Such a place is probably important

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to everybody everywhere, but in Bacon County [Georgia]—although nobody to my knowledge ever said it—the people understood that if you do not have a home place, very little will ever be yours, really belong to you in the world.”²

Even when the home place was no longer in the family, it still was talked about, driven by, and kept alive through memories. It was a source of identity and belonging. Or, as Eudora Welty has written,

There may come to be new places in our lives that are second spiritual homes—closer to us in some ways, perhaps, than our original homes. But the home tie is the blood tie. And had it meant nothing to us, any other place thereafter would have meant less, and we could carry no compass inside ourselves to find home ever, anywhere at all. We would not even guess what we had missed.³

Much of the work of the small Southern farm of the last century was solitary. So the Southerner of that day learned solitude, and with that solitude, for many, came a spirituality and reverence for a world larger than self. People were also gregarious, and as opportunities arose, they gathered together and told stories. Southerners certainly aren't the only storytellers, but storytelling is particular to the way of life Southern geography demands. All of us who are old enough and lived in farming communities have childhood memories of sitting on someone's front porch listening to adults tell stories to the background music of night creatures, the steady rhythm of rocking chairs, and the distinctive frog-croaking creaks of the porch swing.

Those Southerners told stories to break the silence of their lives. But they had learned to live with and in the silence. They had learned from solitude that life has its rhythm and that most things will wait for you. In a hot country, the art of conserving your energy is highly refined, including even how you modify your speech. All of that influenced the Southerner's belief in and approach to God.

On the other hand, Mormonism grew up in the cool climate and protection of the mountains, producing an energetic faith and, over time, I would argue, governance as “firm as the mountains around us.” At the turn of the previous century, the growing restored Church was introduced to the deep South. There in that hot and languid country where passion for the cloven tongues of Pentecost runs as hot as the Fourth of July—or perhaps the 24th of July, which is even hotter—pockets of acceptance developed.

For the first few years, most converts emigrated West, mainly to the San Luis Valley in Colorado. When the call for emigration ended, permanent congregations were established, and for more than half a century, there was a Southern version of the Church—warm of heart, slow, perhaps sluggish, and a bit charismatic—that contrasted with the cool and energetic Western version. The difference was not in doctrine, even though there were probably instances of differences in doctrinal interpretation. After all, this was a land where grace predominated. The differences can be seen as a reflection of climate and geography. Life could be hard in a climate that could

sap your strength before the sun rose. Southerners loved God, but they had made their peace with Him. This truce consisted of agreeing not to make too many demands on each other. The LDS Church, however, has a way of demanding much of people. And in a small place like Little Utah, demands increase because the prescribed Church jobs remain constant regardless of the numbers available to fill them. But somehow those slow-speaking folks found ways to deflect many of the demands. They did it not because of a lack of testimony, but from, I think, a deep belief growing out of their solitude that worship and religious practice were inevitably private and personal.

Out of this view of worship grew a certain independence collectively reflected in their church buildings. In the rural South, the construction of a meeting place was a fairly simple affair. A group of like-minded believers would decide they needed a place of worship, and they would build one. They constructed a building in terms of the knowledge and monies available to them. Typically, those church buildings were simple, rectangular, one-room structures. No matter how plain, the buildings reflected the resources available to the congregation, but perhaps most important, a building reflected its congregation's independence. They didn't need anyone's permission to build a church.

In 1886, my Baptist-professing great-grandfather became the pastor of a country church set deep in those Coastal Plains. The Jones Creek Baptist Church had been founded in 1810 when twenty-one men and women wrote and signed a “Church Covenant.” It reads in part:

We the inhabitants of the vicinity of Jones Creek . . . Do Covenant and agree in a Solemn Gospel engagement to give ourselves up to God and to one another to walk together in the fear of God and in Christian love one with another. . . .⁴

They built a small meetinghouse that served them for several years until they outgrew it. “Hendley Foxworth Home, a member [of the congregation] . . . submitted a design for a large, box-like building and, after some deliberation, his plan was adopted.”⁵ Money was raised, and the building built. Its simple frame construction was much like the church building I call mine.

Little Utah's history is similar. Those LDS converts wished to have a place to meet and worship. Just months after that January 1905 baptism, Morning Parker Davis's son-in-law deeded two acres of his six-hundred-acre farm to the church for the construction of a building and a cemetery. The rustic building served as both church and school. When the building became too small, a new building was constructed on the site in 1918. Though still quite plain and simple, this newer building reflected the enlarged membership and increased resources. Still, it was a reflection of that community of Saints and their larger Southern context.

During the early 1950s, a friend's family moved into a small rural Southern town. There was a small LDS branch there, and my friend's father was called as branch president. One of his first acts was to release the sister who had served faithfully and

CHURCH AS A PLACE

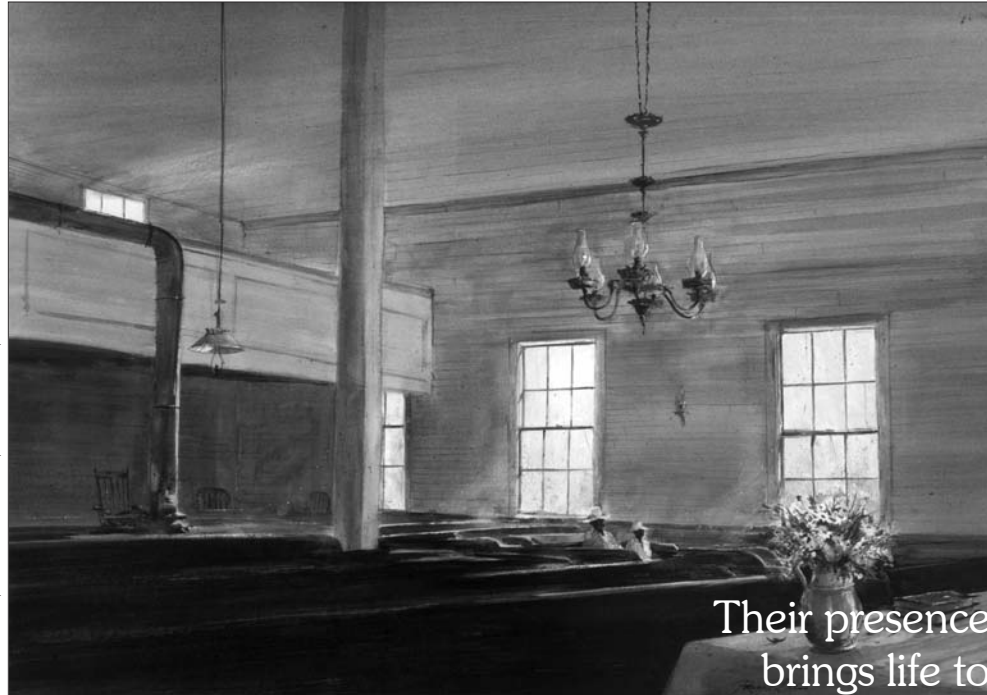
RAY ELLIS, AN artist who has painted many scenes of the tidewater low country of Georgia and South Carolina, named one of his paintings, *Morning Prayer*. It depicts the interior of a Southern country church. There two women in their Sunday best, hats included, sit side by side in the otherwise empty building.

Embraced by the diffused early morning light, the women are dwarfed by the building. The place looms about them with its unadorned, handcrafted simplicity. Yet their presence brings life to the painting, just as the building gives life to them. They worship and are the embodiment of worship in a place of worship. They and the building have separate biographies, yet their stories converge, just as my story merges with that of Little Utah. *Morning Prayer* opens a window into those intersecting stories. It does this in part because of what Ellis did not include in his painting. He did not paint that portion of the building where the pulpit is located. He painted the part where the people congregate, the pews and the potbelly stove at the rear of the building. I can't say what Ellis had in mind, but I believe that by both the title, *Morning Prayer*, and the absence of the pulpit, he is saying that there is nothing, or no one, between the two women and God. They are in their sacred place petitioning the Lord in

the purest and simplest way. It is primal individual worship, with hints of community.

There is, of course, a larger congregation of which the women are a part. Each member of the congregation voluntarily comes together in individual pursuit of the sacred but believing they will benefit individually by sharing collectively. The church as a building and institution exists for the congregation, not the other way around. The church is not that which is worshiped, though it may be loved. The function of the church is to facilitate the individual's pursuit of salvation. There should never be confusion between the individual's primary role and the church's supporting role.

I came to love the unique, little white frame building that was distinctly ours. The building meant more to me than a place to attend meetings or be instructed in how to live the



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well for many years as branch clerk. My friend's father served as branch president for only a short time before employment took him elsewhere. One of the first actions of the man who succeeded him (a long-time member of the branch) was to recall the sister as branch clerk.

This kind of independence is also illustrated by the experience of my friend's father when he called the Church building department in Salt Lake seeking help regarding a problem with the building. "What building?" he was asked. "We don't own a building in that place."

"That may be," he said, "but we meet in it every Sunday and have for years, and everybody in town thinks it belongs to the Mormon Church." Apparently when the church was constructed, no one knew it should have been deeded over to the Church.

I relate these instances to suggest that LDS congregations were not in many respects different from their Protestant neighbors. What the Mormons and the Baptists of Jones Creek knew was that they needed a place to meet. They desired the association of like believers in their pursuit of salvation and a place in which that association could take place. They didn't feel they needed anyone's permission to build a meetinghouse. With that came a sense of ownership. It was *their* place of worship. In that context, both individuality and independence in worship and belief flourished.

This desire to join together with others in communal worship is obviously not confined to any one geographic region. People of like minds come together every day and establish meetinghouses where they can worship as they believe. It just doesn't happen in the LDS Church any longer. That fact, I suspect, shapes our conception of the purpose of our church buildings and the nature of our worship there. But we at Little Utah were grounded in our religious life by a place.

Mormon life. The building was the embodiment of my belief, implanted there, that my spiritual growth was my individual domain, though I could join with others in a collective effort to know and understand God and his plan of salvation. My individual responsibility for spiritual growth, for knowing God's will for me, could never be subjugated or abdicated to a group, or an institution, or another person. The flow of my church cultivated a current of belief that our worship was defined by ourselves.

In those days at Little Utah, Church headquarters and leaders were far away, and consequently the influence Church leaders exerted was different in the South than in the West. The president and prophet was held in high esteem, and the concept of twelve apostles served to underpin the truthfulness of the Church. But the persons of the twelve apostles played a less important role, with the exception of LeGrand Richards and Charles A. Callis, who were both past presidents of the Southern States Mission.

Another difference resulting from distance was found in attitudes about temple participation. Temple marriage was perceived to be of value, but few managed it. Couples who went to the temple did so generally later in life, and it was a one-time trip. When possible, the children were also sealed then, but that didn't always happen.

The membership of the ward was interesting. In almost every case, one spouse in each couple was a convert. Marrying outside the Church was the pattern, and it reflected not so much a lack of testimony as the way geography and the larger Southern culture negated aspects of the Mormon belief system. That is, for the most part, we were farmers and sons and daughters of farmers. Farm life and the community growing out of it had its own way of forming relationships that transcended the marriage guidelines that came from Utah headquarters.

The absence of temples also meant an absence of annual temple recommend interviews with the bishop and stake president. Consequently, and significantly, there was less emphasis upon allegiance to Church leaders and Church procedures than there is today. Although we sustained the Church leaders at stake conferences (at least those did who made the two-hundred-mile roundtrip to attend), they were removed from our lives. Somehow, I believe, we thought we determined our needs and how to meet them. I am not sure we would have understood the reasoning behind having everything programmed in Salt Lake. The Church in the South was perceived as a vehicle, a tool and implement, less defining and demanding than it appears today. The focus was upon, to use scriptural phrases, "trusting in the Lord," "relying upon the Lord," "walking with the Lord." The heart of the matter was what existed between the individual and God.

And the stories we told were different from those told in the center stakes. As youngsters, we heard stories of human nature in the context of hunting, fishing, and farming. We didn't hear stories about ancestors crossing the plains, since there were none. There were no stories of Uncle Heber or Uncle Golden. Nor were there stories about missions, since

none had served missions. The only Church stories we heard, and they became increasingly frequent as I grew older, were those in Sunday School and priesthood manuals. We may have heard a few stories about Morning Parker Davis and her descendants and some of the other early Coastal Plains saints, but somehow they were squeezed out over time, replaced by the larger stories blessed by headquarters.

WHEN A PLACE IS NOT A PLACE

I GRADUATED FROM high school and went away to college in the West. Mormon churches stood on every corner, but none of them looked like mine. I went on a mission, returned home, resumed college, graduated, and went to graduate school in the Midwest. Somewhere in all of this, I realized that once you had seen one LDS church, you had seen them all. I began to wonder how someone could develop any feelings at all for his or her place of worship when it looked like every other place of worship. Where was the attachment?

At the same time, Main Street U.S.A. was becoming increasingly standardized. In every town of any size, there are streets that are copies of each other. There are the franchise eateries and chain-store businesses. Look-alikes, they are the streets where you can be lost and at the same time be on familiar territory. They are the streets where you can walk into a store and realize that you could be any place in the country, and now the world. The Israeli geographer David Newman calls it the "McDonaldization of the world's landscape."⁶

What do these places offer us? They give us the comfortable assurance that there will be no surprises. The products we receive will vary little no matter where we are. So when we travel cross-country and see the familiar sign of a fast food establishment, we already know both the menu and the taste. We are comforted, but there are no risks. And there will never be intimacy with place. We may love Burger King, but there will never be "our" Burger King to love, "our" Taco Bell that will become the subject of memories and stories. With these changes, we have lost part of what makes our identity.

The Church seems to have traveled a road similar to that of Main Street U.S.A. Both the Church and corporate America have decided they prefer identical-looking buildings. These serve the purpose of being easily recognized no matter where one is. And of course, having standardized buildings is economical, saving time and money. For the Church, it eliminates the potential problem of a local congregation that might get out of hand with its building. This program eliminates the problem of the haves building elaborate showpieces and not welcoming the have-nots to participate, as apparently happened in the Book of Mormon. Unfortunately, the program also results in people feeling detached from their place of worship just as people feel detached from fast food eateries.

Another similarity between the Church and corporate America is management strategies. In the world of chain store businesses, planning is done at the corporate office by the major officers. Products are selected at that level, and they vary



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very little from store to store. Few decisions need to be made at the store level. There, the manager makes sure there is sufficient inventory of the centrally approved merchandise and that there are enough employees to distribute the product. Store-level work tends to be routine and consists of following directions. If everyone follows the guidelines from headquar-

ters, the store should be successful, that is, profitable.

In the case of the Church, all lessons, meetings, and programs are planned or outlined in Salt Lake City. Stake- and ward-level leaders implement the programs with little freedom to vary from them. Bishops and stake presidents make few decisions beyond staffing the programs and holding the specified meetings within the specified time format. They essentially manage a corporate-owned store. Certainly bishops and stake presidents provide spiritual succor to the members. Their congregants are regularly inspired and encouraged through individual counseling. Still, leaders' work and the kinds of direction they give generally follow the guidelines of a framework generated elsewhere. And the organization fosters a sense that the "success" of local units can be measured by statistics that function in much the same way as do production quotas.

So we attend meetings in our respective congregations where the format is the same. In sacrament meeting, the

speakers have usually been assigned their topics. We have recycled lessons in our various classes. And we do all of this in meetinghouses that all look essentially alike. Not only do our buildings look alike and our services follow the same pattern, but so do the members. We look alike and dress alike and talk alike in almost every way. There is little diversity among those who regularly attend LDS meetings. Those who are different most often conform or drift away. We are institutionalized, and if the program doesn't fit, the individual or congregation needs to change. We have reached a point where we have very little voice in our church activity, let alone ownership.

To be sure, we are encouraged to be close to the Lord, so he can guide us in our personal lives and church assignments. But because of the repeated admonition that one should never seek a position or calling in the Church, along with the directive that one should never turn down an assignment or calling, we have effectively curtailed personal inspiration. We have made inspiration the purview of someone else in that large area of our lives that is under the umbrella of the Church. Upon reflection, it seems quite strange that we have effectively prohibited the Lord from revealing to the individual where he or she is to serve.

In making these claims, I am not saying that Mormonism is the only tradition that has been influenced by the corporate model. Wendell Berry, who has written so much from his farm in Kentucky about place and community, says most modern churches look like they were built by robots without reference to the heritage of church architecture or respect for place. . . . Modern Christianity has become as specialized in its organizations as other modern organizations, wholly concentrated on the individual shibboleths of "growth," counting its success in numbers, and on the very strange enterprise of "saving" the individual, isolated, and disembodied soul.⁷

Certainly, not all churches, not even all LDS buildings, fall under Berry's indictment. In recent years, I have had occasion to attend two different Protestant churches. I was struck by the contrasts I felt and saw with what I presently experience and have experienced in nearly all LDS meetinghouses I've attended since leaving Little Utah. In the first building, I attended a wedding and later a funeral. Both times, I was moved by the simple beauty of their worship area, what is often called the

sanctuary. It came from the simplicity and naturalness of the setting. Its design allowed the beauty of a wooded lot to be seen through large, plate glass windows, without the distraction of nearby busy streets. In addition, natural light flooded the room, making it, I felt, a wonderful place in which to pray, sing hymns, study the scriptures, and, yes, even to say farewell to a cherished friend.

In contrast, the chapel of my ward building has no windows and is lighted artificially. It seems to me now dark and confining. Putting doctrine aside, the chapel in my meeting-house does not facilitate the joy of worship or the restoration of one's soul, as did the Protestant church I just mentioned.

Later, my wife and I attended a community-sponsored workshop at another local church. This building was not elaborate and was, in fact, a metal prefab. But the story the interior told was that it was home to an involved congregation. The members clearly perceived that the building was more than a place to simply attend meetings to receive instruction on one's duties and responsibilities. This place seemed to be a center for the here and now as well as for hope in the future. There were tables with pamphlets and flyers about community activities that might interest the members. The walls contained artwork by one of the members. And the classrooms and corridors were full of the drawings and thoughts of the children. It reminded me of the refrigerator door of families with young children. It all verged on clutter, but it wasn't distracting. It looked *lived in*. I mentioned to my wife that this building looks used and enjoyed, whereas our tradition's philosophy seems to be to make our buildings look as though we have not yet moved in.

UNSETTLED CONCLUSIONS

I MAY SEEM to have come down pretty hard on the standardization of the Church or, to paraphrase Newman, the McDonaldization of the Church's landscape. Newman also states that "a globalized world is not a multicultural world. It is one in which uniform standards are imposed by a small elite upon the rest, normally for their own economic benefit."⁸

None of us would accuse the Church leaders of establishing such a strong, centralized Church government for personal economic gain, or even for personal gratification. But we might rightly ask how it has occurred. Or why. It is fair to ask what was gained. Of several reasons as to how it might have occurred, I will mention two.

The first, of course, is that the Lord revealed it to the prophet. Obviously, if I thought that, I would not be writing this essay. But being the well-trained Mormon I am, I might well give that answer if the question came up during a priesthood class. However, I am not aware of any revelation or set of revelations that would lead to the level of organizational specificity and centralization we have today. (As an aside, such revelations would not require pilot programs.) I don't have any real evidence for why I don't think there are one or more revelations that suggest the level of standardization we see in the Church. So with one final observation, I will simply move on

to what I see as the main reason this might have occurred: most General Authorities come from corporate or management backgrounds.

I think the most likely reason the Church has become comfortable in its standardization has to do with what I have heard referred to as a "gospel culture." The proof text might be Paul's statement in Galatians: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28). Those arguing for standardization might extol the beauty of the idea that as we become one in Christ, we are freed from the limitations of local and regional cultures. And the evidence of our success in moderating diversity is the fact that a church of so many millions apparently needs only one international magazine to promote the gospel culture around the globe—outside the English-speaking world, that is.

In a practical sense, the gospel culture prescribes acceptable behavior for Church members, making it easy for them to fit in, no matter where they go. A family can move from one part of the country to another and never be strangers in their relationship to the Church. All they need to do is identify the ward whose boundaries their new residence falls within, attend that first Sunday, and they are *home*. They are no more strangers, but fellow citizens with the saints. That is a remarkable organizational achievement and certainly a benefit. The next step is for the family to patiently wait for the Lord to reveal to the bishop in what capacity they are to serve. That, too, is a powerful organizational concept that contributes to operational orderliness.

I believe there is a gospel culture, and it is related to being one in Christ. I can't imagine a higher aspiration than yearning for that unity. Nor could anything be more fulfilling than a brotherhood and sisterhood, no matter our other differences, sharing that yearning. But operational orderliness is not necessarily indicative of a gospel culture centered in Christ. I wonder even with the numerous benefits of homogenization if we are curtailing what the Apostle Paul calls "the deep things of God" (I Cor. 2:10). I am afraid that too many of us experience church rather than the deep spiritual things, in the same sense that Wendell Berry writes of experiencing the freeway rather than the landscape.

[I was] hardly aware of the country I was passing through, because on the freeway one does not have to be. The landscape has been so subdued so that one may drive over it at seventy miles per hour without any concession whatsoever to one's whereabouts. One might as well be flying. Though one is in Kentucky one is not experiencing Kentucky; one is experiencing the highway, which might be in nearly any hill country east of the Mississippi.⁹

Similarly, in church, we will receive the same fare in nearly any meeting in any state of the union. Why do we think that a group of professional women on the Wasatch Front needs the same Relief Society lesson as a group of farm wives on the banks of the Satilla River? How can we experience God when everything is already worked out for us? Even the young

people sixteen and seventeen years of age, as I discovered from teaching Sunday School, are persuaded that all of the answers are already given. They may not have the answers themselves, but they are convinced that the bishop or the prophet has them, and should they, the youth, ever need or want the answer to a troublesome question, it can be readily obtained. Or if an answer is not forthcoming, it is because it isn't needed. As one of my Sunday School scholars said when I asked if they ever wondered about their standing with the Lord, "It crosses my mind, but I figure that as long as I am worthy to receive a temple recommend, I am OK." That came from a young man heavily recruited by BYU for an academic scholarship.

Are we truly secure in a transcendent gospel culture, or are we edging closer and closer to not knowing where we are, or perhaps who we are? In response, I hear a voice declaring that the Church and the members are faring quite well, thank you very much. But I am not personally reassured. I am even less reassured when I think of the lines from the second verse of our hymn "The Wintery Day":

I cannot go to rest, but linger still
 In meditation at my windowsill,
 While, like the twinkling stars in heaven's dome,
 Come one by one sweet memories of home.
 And wouldst thou ask me where my fancy roves
 To reproduce the happy scenes it loves. . . ?

I do not know what scenes of home, what happy memories the youth of today will reproduce when they reach my age. They most likely will not have a Church home place as I do.

WHAT IS THE final chapter of Little Utah's biography? The building was sold several years ago to another denomination, and it was moved to another site. The LDS congregation moved to a new standard-issue building in town. There they do all they can to accomplish the tasks that others set for them. The meeting place in town is not called Little Utah, but the Pearson Ward. Little Utah Church was never a little Utah; however, the church in town is more Utah in culture than Southern, drawl aside, and could easily be known as a little Utah, as could the other wards of the stake.

At the old site where the country church sat, a monument has been erected in memory of those early members who raised the money and built the church as a home for their fledgling religious community. It is fitting, I think, that the monument was conceived, financed, and erected by descendants of those early members. It is disconcerting that no such monument will ever be, or could be, erected at the LDS building in town. ☹

NOTES

1. Anne Michaels, *Fugitive Places* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1997), 167.
2. Harry Crews, *A Childhood: the Biography of a Place* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 13–14.
3. Eudora Welty, *On Writing* (New York: The Modern Library, 2002), 57.
4. Elmer Oris Parker, *A History of Jones Creek Baptist Church* (Greenville, SC: A Press, 1985), 5.

5. *Ibid.*, 6.

6. David Newman, as quoted in Michael Lerner, *Spirit Matters* (Charlottesville, VA: Hampton Roads Publishing, 2000), 69. See also, George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 2000).

7. Wendell Berry, "Christianity and the Survival of Creation," *The Art of the Common Place* (Washington, DC: Counterpoint, 2002), 318.

8. Newman, 69.

9. Wendell Berry, "An Entrance to the Woods," in Phillip Lopate, *The Art of the Personal Essay* (New York: Anchor Books, 1994), 672.



IN THE DARK, THE WORLD ENDS AT THE WINDSHIELD

The Atlas is under my foot. The wheels rotate silently. His voice slithers lazily over me, drowsy hands pampering the wheel. *You understand?* Silence. *Do you understand that I might lose control and hurt you if you don't learn to respect me?* Yes. I know my body has finally come around since the days when nightmares paralyzed me; fear rocketed up my legs. We pass the corner where the kid threw me on the ground and twisted my arm behind my back as I returned home from school. My friends scattered in all directions. I didn't cry until they looked back afterwards, saw me, and kept going. So it is not that I am unaware I do not deserve to live, rather I calculate that my father cannot hurt me now. He has to drive the car, and I am expected at my friend's house soon. We only live three blocks apart, but who knows what could happen in this world, what with it being dark. I almost grin, like Hansel when he first foiled his parents into loving him, and away I am, outside in the perilous night and ringing the doorbell. Inside, I tell the story to my friend, who can't believe it. Then he smiles. I can break the cycle, he suggests, inspired, but I look down, shaking my head silently from side to side. I know I do not possess the power to give life. We head down to the basement. The Indy Circuit is always ready for new drivers to explode onto the scene, and who can tell when we will become champions?

—MICHAEL COLLINS