

The Hosanna Shout in Washington, D.C.

By *Eugene England*

Short essay detailing England's experiences and feelings as he attended two Washington Temple dedicatory sessions.

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THE FIRST TIME I participated in the “Hosanna Shout” I felt the presence of actual beings from another world joining us in that cry of praise and the following “Hosanna Anthem.” That was in the Celestial Room of the Oakland Temple in 1964, following President David O. McKay’s dedicatory prayer. My heightened spiritual sensitivity was partly due, I am sure, to the power of that prayer and my special feelings about President McKay—but also to the way in which President Hugh B. Brown led us in that unique ceremony (apparently performed only at temple dedications and deriving in part from the jubilant waving of palm branches during Ancient Israel’s Feast of the Tabernacles). The experience, especially that first time, could have seemed awkward or even bizarre—mature citizens of the down-to-earth twentieth century, in business suits and college tweed and stylish bouffant hairdos, waving handkerchiefs over our heads and actually shouting hosannas. But President Brown, in explaining the procedure to us and then leading us with his own special dignity, which is intellectual and moral as well as physical, helped invest the experience with a solemn joy that was overwhelming; it was a full-hearted and full-voiced response to the prophetic prayer we had just heard. And I do believe, strange as it perhaps seems for me—a skeptical, rationalistic, university-trained professor of English—to be saying this, that we were joined by spiritual beings—whether former prophets, angelic messengers or repentant sinners—who had similar reasons to our own to rejoice.

Elder Brown was also present at the recent temple dedication in Washington, D.C., and he again gave our experience a special poignance; though he did not officiate because he is no longer in the First Presidency and only spoke briefly in an early session we did not attend, friends reported the spirit and content of what he said, and it set the tone for that week in Washington for us: He merely told of his long involvement in the planning of the Washington Temple and its special, personal meaning to him; at the same time he spoke forthrightly about his long illness and more than once said, in effect, “This is a departing point for me. Perhaps a final preparation for an assignment to another field.” That unusual emotional openness, even bluntness, on the part of General Authorities who spoke in the various sessions was a characteristic of the dedication that my wife Charlotte and I most valued. We

had traveled from one of the farthest outlying Branches in the Temple District (which includes most of the Midwest as well as the Eastern United States) and were able to stay most of the week with friends in Washington and enjoy some of the city's historical and cultural richness and see the lovely wooded reaches of the Potomac River. But it was our particular good fortune to be able to get some extra unclaimed tickets from one of those we stayed with who is a bishop and thus to attend two of the ten sessions. A dedicatory service for a temple is much like a session of General Conference, but it is also profoundly different, and attending an extra session made us especially conscious of this.

Tuesday we traveled to Mount Vernon through the muted colors of Virginia's late fall countryside, and Wednesday we spent the morning and early afternoon with our friends Claudia and Richard Bushman from Boston; we briefly visited both houses of Congress (our representatives were disappointingly casual and inattentive to each other or to basic issues, in my untutored opinion), roamed the statuary halls in the Capitol Building to find Brigham Young (impressive in seated but prophetic grandeur, though at present pushed into a rather inconspicuous corner because of Bicentennial renovations), and watched with unfeigned awe the closing minutes of an argument before the Supreme Court (the only one of our institutions, Richard noted, which we can say, without reservation, has worked). At lunch we talked about the growing self-consciousness of Mormon women (Claudia is Editor of the new independent journal for LDS women, *Exponent II*, and of a collection of essays on nineteenth century Mormon women soon to be published by Peregrine-Smith), and that led naturally to a brief consideration of the merits of polygamy in the hereafter (Richard seemed to be the only one in favor); but mainly we used that reunion to strengthen each other by reviewing the special joys and opportunities and challenges we are experiencing in raising our large families outside Mormon Country. We then dashed to the new Hirshhorn Museum of twentieth century art for a quick walk through before the 4:30 dedication session. The Bushmans left early because Richard, as President of the Boston Stake, had been asked to give the closing prayer and was to be on the stand in the Solemn Assembly Room even well in advance of the fifteen minute period before each session when we were to be seated and thoughtfully preparing ourselves for the service. Charlotte and I lingered a bit at the museum and then drove out the Baltimore Expressway to the northeast so that we could come back to the Temple along the Beltway from the east and enjoy that spectacular view of the Temple rising directly out of a grove of trees and growing dramatically as you approach almost to its base and then turn with the Beltway along its side. After the turnoff from the Beltway, the road back to the Temple passes through nearly a mile of richly wooded park. Our first close-up view dispelled some of our anxiety, aroused by early sketches we had seen and by some of the recent Gentile appraisals of the Temple's architecture ("reminiscent of Disney World"; "like a suburban hotel"), because it certainly is a striking and successful conception, particularly in its setting, and we feel certain it will soon establish itself as "beautiful" in the hearts of Church members of all varieties of aesthetic training and preference, much as the Salt Lake and Hawaiian Temples have done. Of course, that is largely because of the emotional significance of what happens in Temples, and

we felt that immediately as we entered and took our places before one of the television sets in the annex (the Solemn Assembly room seats about 100, and other thousands were gathered before closed circuit TV in other rooms and halls, from the Celestial Room to the foyer). We meditated for the fifteen minutes, with the image before us of the First Presidency, all in white suits (that unusual attire at first somewhat startling but soon seeming quite apt and becoming), seated behind the highest level of the white tiers of triple pulpits that have characterized Solemn Assembly Rooms since Kirtland. Then President Marion G. Romney, in the opening sermon of the session, sketched the history of temples ancient and modern, and formed an expansive image of the temple as both a sacred enclosure, a place for Christ to dwell, and also a point of continuity, opening out to connect earth with heaven and the living with the dead—serving through redemptive love to unite in one great family all generations as well as all nations of the children of God. I thought, yes, surely it is for us the center of things, the spiritual navel, the still point of the turning world.

As we listened we remembered again that purely architectural standards are secondary to some other things, and even our one criticism (the subtly delightful highlighting of the six towers with abstract stained glass columns at the corners is marred by rather harsh color combinations in the glass that seem to suggest an excessively appropriate red, white, and blue) faded quickly into the background as we heard President Romney recount the deeply moving stories of the dedication and sacrifices, the nearly rash idealism of the early Saints who built the Kirtland and Nauvoo and early Utah Temples. He reminded us how comparatively costly those Temples were, given the frontier economy and the relative destitution of the Saints, told of their responsiveness to the Lord's commands for haste in preparing a place in Kirtland for him to send His messengers and in Nauvoo for them to perform sacred work for the salvation of their dead loved ones, of their immense care in crafting the buildings, even in their haste, and yet their marvelous nonchalance in leaving those mere buildings (in Nauvoo, immediately after a secret nighttime dedication under threat of mob interference) when they had to move on with the Prophets. I remembered my own favorite story about temple building—of the Nauvoo women who collected their few remaining pieces of china to be crushed into the mortar used on the temple face so that it would shine with the rays of the westering sun. And I thought of the fifty years of building the Salt Lake Temple and the seventeen days of celebration that marked its dedication— what it must have been like for those people, my actual and my spiritual ancestors, to shout hosanna in the House of God. Those rough and ready frontier people, living at first in sod huts, struggling in the Great Basin sand and dirt to stay alive, those people whose direct, pragmatic, even violent ways I know from reading their diaries and from my own early life; I think of them going up to the House of the Lord in St. George, or Logan or Manti—and finally in that loveliest of all buildings, in Salt Lake—and washing themselves and making themselves clean, looking on their own finest craftsmanship, that imaged for them the possibilities of gentleness and progress and perfection, seeing the religious history of the world acted out before them and themselves joining in that action in such a way as to give them a clear sense of their

place in that history, having their hearts turned to their fathers and their children and to their wives and husbands in sacred covenants, being given, in short, a tremendous charge of idealism to work its slow transformation on the clay of their lives. I thought how the same thing was happening now, the gathering there of people, like ourselves, from far-flung, struggling mission Branches and, like our East Coast friends, from the pressures of an increasingly secularized society, the blear and smear of trade and, yes, the soiling politics of Washington; and I thought of the moving, powerful idealism that was touching us all.

J. Willard Marriott spoke at that session. He is perhaps the most prominent of the growing enclave of extremely successful and powerful Washington Mormons, head of a growing empire of hotels, restaurants, and now catering services. He is best known, even in the Church, for his business success and his generous gifts to Brigham Young University, the University of Utah, and other institutions, but that quickly faded into the background as he spoke humbly and movingly, with great theological soundness, about the large painting of Christ's second coming in the Temple foyer that he had been responsible for helping plan and arrange. The painting, which we were able to examine in detail on a tour of the Temple after the session, is certainly impressive as it confronts you at the end of a long, bridged corridor from the annex to the main foyer where it covers one wall—though it escapes me why we sent Mormon artists to Paris to prepare to paint the scenes in the Salt Lake Temple and yet are now using non-Mormon artists. The figure of Christ, coming in His glory, is pleasant and commanding enough, though the face is too merely cheerful and Aryan for my taste, much like the one of Christ in the new mural in the Church Office Building (also by a non-Mormon); it is not nearly as penetratingly tragic as the one by Hoffmann that was President Harold B. Lee's favorite, or as morally challenging as the one by Kim Whitesides that was on the cover of *Dialogue* several years ago. But again going beyond esthetic considerations, the painting serves as an important, arresting reminder of the seriousness of what we are preparing for in our Temples—of our literal faith in an end to secular history and of the joy and sorrow that will attend that literal separation of the sheep from the goats (yes, in case you have wondered, the one Black in the painting—as well as a Polynesian, an oriental, and a Lamanite—is on Christ's right hand with the righteous "sheep" who are being caught up to meet those of the First Resurrection coming with Christ; the unrighteous "goats" on Christ's left hand are all white).

In discussing the spiritual challenge of that painting, and of the event it confronts us with, Brother Marriott quoted John the Revelator's report of the Lord's great command to us all in these latter days: "Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen. . . . Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues." That must be a personally poignant challenge to Brother Marriott and to all other post-Watergate Washington Mormons, who are definitely in that world, though trying not to be of it—people like Jack and Renee Carlson, with whom we stayed (he is Assistant Secretary of the Interior for Energy and Minerals and with the recent shift by President Ford towards reliance on the Interior Department to "handle" energy is in an extremely important and exposed position), or Mark Cannon, executive assistant for the Supreme Court Justices, or the many serving in

Congress or in less prominent but responsible positions in the National Archives, the Justice Department, Federal Trade Commissions, etc. Mary Bradford, whose husband, Chick, is a prominent banker as well as a Bishop in Washington, and who interviewed and wrote about Washington Mormons for a recent issue of *The Ensign*, thinks that they all face some special problems in the corridors of power. She feels that basic Mormon ideals and conditioning make them especially vulnerable, particularly naive and reticent, incapable of certain instincts and possibilities of action demanded in the heady infighting of the big government-big business complexes. Perhaps she is right; Christ talked of the Children of Darkness being wiser in some things than the Children of Light. The Byzantine depths revealed by Watergate are perhaps, and perhaps we can rejoice at it, beyond our fathoming; if indeed the Elders of Israel are to save the Constitution they may perhaps best do it indirectly, or at least at lower levels of power, by in some sense coming out of Babylon and avoiding both her sins and her plagues.

Certainly the Temple will help, and the dedication was a great beginning. At the close of that first session, Richard Bushman, speaking with a moving clarity and forthrightness that resonated with the perspective gained from his deep and successful immersion in historical scholarship and teaching at a secular university, combined with humble, sometimes sorrowful service to the Lord as a Bishop and Stake President, asked that the young people there (those over twelve were invited and many were there from all over the East, including his own son) might be inspired with strength to live purely in a difficult world and be moved to return to make their Eternal Marriage vows and to help bring salvation to children of God of other generations. His prayer is already being answered in the spiritual rejuvenation of those—young and old—who attended. Our hearts responded to that special directness of the General Authorities, who took advantage of about the only occasion they have any more where they can feel free to talk directly to us as “Temple Saints,” without the intrusion of the microphone and the television camera and the sense of responsibility to “the world” listening in that tends to make many of their General Conference addresses comparatively cautious and impersonal. But at the dedication, two of those who I remember as among the most reticent to be blunt and personal, Alvin R. Dyer and Loren Dunn (one speaking in each of the two sessions we attended), gave two of the most moving because most direct and personal talks we heard there or have heard any place else within memory. Elder Dyer, who like Elder Brown has not spoken in Conference recently because of illness, was helped to the pulpit by his Brethren, and speaking in a voice still profoundly affected by his stroke from some years ago, one naturally breaking toward falsetto and pushed even more that way by bursts of emotion, was yet blessed with sufficient control to complete his remarks and move us to tears with a simple testimony of how his illness had chastened and benefited him, made him aware and appreciative of things he had not before seen. Elder Dunn, in a Thursday morning session we were able to attend in the Solemn Assembly Room, put aside his prepared sermon and, in the first really personal expression I remember hearing from him, told a series of accounts by members of his own family who had had manifestations or visitations from their kindred dead and then bore one of the most directly touching testimonies of the

existence of God and of His love expressed in salvation for the dead I have ever felt. That set the emotional tone for the session: after Elder Boyd K. Packer had spoken with a similar directness about the Oakland Temple dedication and a specially revealed message he had heard President Lee give there concerning turning the hearts of the fathers to their children *in this earth life* through building strong families, and after Patriarch Eldred G. Smith had given the most forthright talk I have heard on the doctrine of an Eternal Mother as an equal partner with our Father in that divine companionship which is our God and our direct model for the purpose of this life and future lives—after all this you can imagine how our hearts were softened and our necks, habitually stiff with the pride of the world, bent to hear the Prophet’s dedicatory prayer. I leave you to read that in one of the Church publications, to see the unique dimensions of that revelation of the heart and mind of Spencer W. Kimball in communion with God, the special diction, self-effacing but precise (speaking of himself as the “incumbent” prophet), combined with a literally stunning vision of the Latter-day work sweeping to its conclusion. We were truly then ready to shout hosannas—and we did. And then joined in that unique expression of Mormon culture, not particularly esthetic, perhaps, but serving much higher values than art, when we united with our leaders and a chorus of our peers in one great circle, our eyes wet with joy but our voices not choked, singing the Hosanna Anthem.

We stayed that night with Bishop Bradford and Mary, talking late into the night after he returned from helping arrange for the funeral of an elderly sister in his ward who had died the day before. Bishop Bradford arose the next morning with his son Steve, who was up at 5:30 to prepare for a long bike ride to his seminary class. The Bishop, talking proudly of his son’s dedication, drove Charlotte and me to the airport on his way to work, and we all parted there, Charlotte to get back home to prepare for the District Relief Society Leadership meetings she was to lead the next day and I to spend a frantic day doing research at the Harvard Library before heading back to the same meetings. As I relaxed after takeoff, I felt the special events of the week settling upon my spirit and strengthening me to meet the great needs of the people in my little Branch—and great needs of my own; and as the plane abruptly banked toward the northeast I glanced down and saw under the wing the Temple, its translucent white marble highlighted in the early sun against the green and grey of that great city.

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