

Opinion Piece on the Provo Temple

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Yes. The Provo Temple is historic.

In October 2021, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints announced the rebuilding of the iconic Provo Temple, a structure reaching its fiftieth anniversary this February. This declaration was not a surprise considering that its twin temple in Ogden was restructured a decade ago. The Provo Temple has been derided by some as resembling a wedding cake or a space ship, typical of the modernistic and efficiency-oriented architecture of the late 1960s and early 1970s. But, it should be argued that this sacred structure is, indeed, historic in its own right, ushering in a dramatic new era of productive temple-work. The regard for this building has gone beyond sentiment. It has been a symbol of faith and progress to not only Utah County, but the legions of those over the years at Brigham Young University and the Missionary Training Center. On top of that, many have begun to appreciate its architectural style which is both stylishly unique and utilitarian.

It should be noted that the Provo Temple has a history like no other in the Church. When the Provo and Ogden Temples were announced in 1967, there had not been a temple dedicated in Utah for over 75 years. The pioneer era temples in Salt Lake, Logan, and Manti accounted for 52 percent of all ordinance work in the Church, according to *Ensign* in 1972. In the era of President David O. McKay, there were not new temple announcements at every General Conference. In fact, the only new temple dedicated in the entire 1960s was in Oakland, California. Although other regions were in need at the time, it was decided that the Provo and Ogden Temples would serve the greatest number of people. The twin temples were designed for efficiency and were significantly smaller than recent temples in Los Angeles and Oakland. That efficiency paid off. For decades, the Provo Temple was the busiest temple in the Church. It was often the locale for first endowments for those stationed at the MTC or BYU who had no previous access to a temple.

The picturesque locale northeast of downtown Provo at the mouth of Rock Canyon was called Temple Hill long before any official plans were made. But once plans for the structure were put in motion, Church architect Emil B. Fetzer proclaimed that, "I think this is the only building that I have designed in words before I started to put the marks on paper." Fetzer went on to describe the design of the Provo Temple as divine revelation, a remarkably effective structure which turned out ordinances at rates exceeding the far larger temples.

It is easy to refute the many reasons posed for taking down the Provo Temple, such as that it is too small to accommodate the strong need. Not only is Provo the only city with two temples,

but pressure has been relieved by temples also in American Fork, Payson, and soon in Orem, Lindon, and Saratoga Springs. The MTC is not the singular training center anymore. There is the argument that it is structurally not sound or unprepared for an earthquake, but like any historic structure, the Church has the resources to update it for any seismic emergency. And Church leaders have had to make alterations several times before with temples, such as with the Manti Temple, but also following public outcry over either design or locations in Tooele, Billings, Montana, and Paris, France. The Provo Temple also exists in that 50-year-old blind spot as modernist architecture is being reassessed, even valued in a new way.

A building does need to evolve. But in Latter-day Saint culture, we are impressed with the hierarchy of structures, taught to revere temples as holy landmarks. The Provo Temple is a testament to the sacrifice and dedication of Saints in Utah County and beyond. The temple exists in works of art at Deseret Book and in calendars and illustrated history books, most notably Richard O. Cowan's *Provo's Two Temples*. Are we now to so easily disregard that esteem? It does not have to be a pioneer temple to be historic, beloved, sacred, or to represent the legacy of faith in Provo, at BYU, and at the MTC, as well as a new era for temple functionality. We would ask the Church to reconsider plans to destroy the structure and to rehabilitate the Provo Temple in a way that preserves its original historic integrity instead of establishing yet another overused temple template that is identical to so many others. Church members should express their opinions to Church Public Relations.