

# An American Religion in Europe

## How Latter-day Saints' Temples Communicate a Worldview of Sublimity and Separation

Marie-Therese Mäder

### 1. The religious worldview of Latter-day Saints' temples

The first Latter-day Saint temple I visited was in Provo (Utah, USA) in 2016,<sup>1</sup> the second was the temple in Friedrichsdorf (near Frankfurt/Main, Germany) in 2019. These temple visits allowed me to better understand the meaning, effect, and function of these buildings, and in particular to focus on the sensory experience of the architecture and the interior design, from the carpeted floors to the mirrors with golden frames and the crystal chandeliers hanging from the ceiling. The insights gained from these field trips will serve as the basis for the current contribution.<sup>2</sup> My focus here is to understand how Mormonism adapted its worldview in its shift to Europe, focusing on the temples of The Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, the largest Mormon community, in Europe.<sup>3</sup> What can be learned from the tem-

---

1 Mäder 2020, 23–26.

2 My studies of the Latter-day Saints started with the investigation of Mormon media productions (about Mormons or produced by Mormons), followed by an analysis of how these media are received, and finally meeting the people »behind the scenes«. See Mäder 2020; Mäder 2021, 72–95; Mäder/Soto-Sanfiel 2019, 98–114.

3 The largest Mormon church, where the main organisation is located in Salt Lake City, is the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints. I refer to this church as LDS, which is used both as a noun and an adjective. From an *emic*, insider perspective, the term »Mormonism« should not be used according to the church's online style guide. Instead one should refer to »the restored gospel of Jesus Christ«. See »Style Guide — The Name of the

ples' architecture about how this genuinely US-American religious community adapted to European contexts, and if and how their American heritage has been Europeanised in the process? What contribution do these temples make to discourses about the role of religion in Europe?

In order to answer these questions, I will discuss the meaning-making practices and rules associated with temples, and analyse the aesthetic dimensions of the temples and their effects, taking into account the history of temple construction in Europe. I will then focus in particular on the Frankfurt temple in Friedrichsdorf, drawing on my observations during my open house visit on 24 September 2019 and my conversation with the representative of the public affairs department of the Mormon community in Frankfurt. My thesis is that the temples are a means to create or represent a religious worldview that can be experienced by members and non-members in Europe. Its worldview is a constitutive element of a religious community. Religious worldviews

convey an overall picture of the world, make it accessible as a cosmos in which the immanent and the transcendent, the controllable and the uncontrollable stand in a relationship to each other. At the same time, they specify how this world should be, they regulate and standardise the relationship to the world.<sup>4</sup>

LDS temples communicate a worldview by means of their architecture, their surrounding outdoor area, and interior design that shape the community members' religious experiences during a temple visit. But how does this communication of a worldview relate to the temples' European context – if at all?

---

Church«, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/style-guide> (accessed September 1, 2021). I am aware that the church itself has specific guidelines on how it is to be named. However, I hold that as an independent researcher, adopting an *etic*, outsider perspective to this project, I should be able to choose the most useful and clearest designation in the context of academic scholarship, even if it might not always be in line with the LDS church's official nomenclature, whilst not intending any pejorative sense by using such *etic* terminology

4 Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018, 56–57 (all translations from German are mine).

In my field study of the Friedrichsdorf temple, I apply a qualitative approach that combines participant observation<sup>5</sup> with a contextualised multisensory analysis of the temple buildings, temple areas, and interiors that attends to the ways in which these affect the various senses.<sup>6</sup> My observations during the temple visit are supplemented by the analysis of Google aerial photographs to examine the terrain in which the temple is located. For my discussion of the other European temples, I draw on visual sources available online. This multi-media and multi-methodological approach allows me to examine the topic of Latter-day Saint temples in Europe from different perspectives that »crystallise« into a partial account of the phenomenon I study here. Communication and gender scholar Laura L. Ellingson developed the concept of »crystallisation« which

combines multiple forms of analysis and multiple genres of representation into a coherent text or series of related texts, building a rich and openly partial account of a phenomenon that problematizes its own construction, highlights researchers' vulnerabilities and positionality, makes claims about socially constructed meanings, and reveals the indeterminacy of knowledge claims even as it makes them.<sup>7</sup>

Part of the reason why such a »crystallization« is valuable is that it acknowledges the indeterminacy of knowledge, which is especially relevant for this study given the relative lack of scholarly resources on Mormon temple architecture and cosmology etc. available to outsiders/researchers. For crystallisation does not claim to provide a comprehensive response to the research questions posed. Instead, spotlights will illuminate the questions' diverse dimensions and multiple methods are applied in an additive strategy, including, as mentioned, the architectural analysis of temple buildings, the analysis of other visual material, field studies, the observation of temple visitors, and the multisensory experience of the temple and its surroundings.

Visual ethnographer Sarah Pink developed this multisensory approach that extends and complements visual methods. She argues that in visual analysis the other senses of smell, touch, taste, and sound are also involved

---

5 Thierbach/Petschick 2014, 855–865.

6 Pink 2011, 601–614; Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018, 31–38.

7 Ellingson 2009, 4.

because they are neurologically connected.<sup>8</sup> For this study of the LDS temples, this means that I refer to different sense experiences in combination with other sources and methods, paying attention to how smell, touch, taste, sound and vision play a part in the temple visit. This multisensory experience of the temple visit then influences the visual analysis of the Google maps images and other photographs from the exterior and the interior of the temples. These different sensory perceptions are brought together in a single analysis, aware of its specific cultural construction that includes personal preferences of specific senses. Therefore, the context of the sources is an important element to add.

The theoretical frame of this study is a cultural studies approach to visual and material religion which understands religion as part of culture where meaning-making practices take place. These practices apply different media (here in particular architecture, cultivated garden areas, and photographs) to communicate religion in secular contexts or in actual religious practices. The ways in which religious meaning is debated, differ. Religious actors use media in their religious practice and media are used to communicate religion in secular contexts. These two perspectives influence each other and both produce, distribute, and consume material and visual sources in the corresponding practices to express and represent religious worldviews.<sup>9</sup>

I will begin by providing some context about temple construction in Europe, practices surrounding temple visits, and the conditions to be met to enter a Latter-day Saint temple. I then analyse three European LDS temples, the Frankfurt temple in Friedrichsdorf, the Bern temple (in Zollikofen, Switzerland), and the temple in Rome (Italy), their setting in the landscape, their architecture, exterior façade, and interior design with attention to their possible effects on visitors. I then shift to the discussion of my field visit to the Frankfurt temple, paying particular attention to the sensory effect of the temple visit. My analysis is supplemented with information about the worldview, canonical narratives, and details about rituals conducted in the temple.

---

8 Pink 2011, 603.

9 Fritz/Höpflinger/Knauss/Mäder/Pezzoli-Olgiati 2018, 13–14.

## 2. Historical context and premises of temple visits in Europe

Experts agree that Mormonism is deeply rooted in American culture and history. The historian of Mormonism Jan Shipps states that »the story of the interrelationships between Mormonism and American culture is reasonably clear.«<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, soon after the foundation of the church in upstate New York in 1830, Europe became important for LDS mission work. In 1837, the first European mission opened in England, and in 1840, the first mainland mission was established in Germany. By 1854, 14 years after the first mission in England was founded, the number of European members rose to 33,000. This is an impressive development compared to Utah with its 12,000 members at the same time. In Utah, membership increased further, to 91,000 members in 1900<sup>11</sup> compared to 268,331 members worldwide.<sup>12</sup> Utah also profited from its European converts. Most of Utah's Mormons were Protestant converts from England (61%) and Scandinavia (31%) as well as German and Swiss Mormons who emigrated to the US-American Zion in the desert, which became part of the American Union in 1896.<sup>13</sup> Yet a few more decades passed until the first temple opened its gates in Europe, not in England as one might expect, but in Zollikofen (Switzerland) in 1955. It was the 6th LDS temple built worldwide. Three years later, in 1958, the first British temple was dedicated in Newchapel (Surrey, near London). In mainland Europe, 30 years after the Zollikofen temple, another one was opened in Freiberg (former German Democratic Republic) as the 27th temple worldwide. Currently there are 14 temples in Europe and five more are announced to be constructed (Brussels, Budapest, Oslo, Russia, Vienna)<sup>14</sup> to serve a community of half a million Latter-day Saints who live in Europe where by now 34 missions have been settled.<sup>15</sup>

---

10 Shipps 1987, 58.

11 Decoo 2015, 543.

12 Shipps 1987, 168.

13 Decoo 2015, 543.

14 The temples' names are not consistent. Sometimes their names refer to the country, the city, or region. See »Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints«, <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/maps/> (accessed August 31, 2021).

15 »Statistics and Church Facts«, <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics> (accessed May 22, 2022).

On the comprehensive website about Mormon temples (an unofficial site as is noted in red letters at the bottom of the page),<sup>16</sup> one of the topics discussed is temple designs. The website specifies »major design phases« in chronological order. The category for European temples is called »overseas temples«. The description of the European temples additionally mentions the challenge of Europe's multilingualism because language is central in the endowment ritual that takes place in the temple. The ceremony re-enacts the narrative from creation to Adam and Eve's banishment from the garden of Eden in different rituals. After ritual cleansing and anointings the participants receive their temple garments which they wear while they stay in the temple. The endowment ceremony also includes a lecture about the Latter-day Saints cosmology which presents a specific challenge when performed in European countries where English is not spoken:

Taking a temple to Europe brought a special challenge, as the staff and training required to present the endowment in various languages would be too difficult in an area where Latter-days Saints were few and scattered. Gordon B. Hinckley was given the challenge to overcome this obstacle, which he did through inspiration, conceiving the idea of using film to present the endowment in a single assembly-style endowment room. The idea was first realized in the Bern Switzerland Temple (1955) and then followed in the Hamilton New Zealand Temple (1958) and London England Temple (1958). These temples have since been remodeled to include multiple stationary endowment rooms.<sup>17</sup>

Beside »multilingualism«, another challenge is certainly to keep the European membership stable and the members active, if not even increasing in number. A study from 2005 found that more members convert to the LDS church than are born in the church (the so-called cradle Mormons).<sup>18</sup> Given the challenges to maintain the Mormon community in Europe, the number of already existing and planned temples is surprising.

---

16 See »List of Temples, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints«, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/list?lang=eng> (accessed July 22, 2021).

17 See »List of Temples«, (see footnote 16).

18 Stark 2005, 136.

Access to a temple is crucial to Mormons in Europe (as elsewhere) because all of the LDS rituals, except baptism, can only be conducted there, such as weddings, the sealing of the family, or the baptisms of the dead. Therefore Latter-day Saints understand the temple visit as a privilege and not as a duty. When visiting a temple, Latter-day Saints have to make specific arrangements. First of all, after being baptised and at least one year after confirmation, the individual needs a temple recommendation authorised by two members of the community which has to be renewed every other year. During the year after confirmation, the applicants are encouraged to apply for a limited-use temple recommendation which allows them to serve in the temple baptistry and to perform baptisms of the dead, a proxy ritual for the dead that all members perform, mostly for deceased family members.<sup>19</sup> Baptism or confirmation even after death results in the possibility that the deceased are still able to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Another effect of these rituals is that they provide reassurance and affirmation of the affiliation with the church.<sup>20</sup> Besides the blessing of a child born into the church, baptism is the first ritual in the life of a Latter-day Saint and at the same time the first ritual of the temple ordinances, even though it does not take place in a temple but in LDS meeting houses or in any other kind of basin. Even rivers or lakes are permissible. However, since baptism marks the »beginning« of a Mormon's life in the community, the temple's baptistry is usually located on the temple's ground floor where the visitors enter. The pool is always supported by twelve oxen representing the twelve tribes of Israel. It also refers to the Old Testament where it is said that in front of the first temple built by Solomon, a large basin was placed on the back of twelve oxen for the ablutions of the priests (1 Kings 7:23–26).<sup>21</sup>

Before the temple visit can take place, the first regional leader (stake presidency) and then a member of their local bishopric interview the applicant on two different occasions. The interview questions are made public so that the applicants are prepared for the conversation. In 2019 the interview questions

---

19 Also, in temples, confirmations and family and couple sealings for deceased people take place. For more details about these rituals see Hammarberg 2013, 176–177.

20 Hammarberg 2013, 176–177.

21 In the Frankfurt temple, the baptistry is located on the ground floor. See <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-6> (accessed August 5, 2022).

had been updated and published online.<sup>22</sup> The 15 interview questions cover the most important Mormon beliefs and commandments that Latter-day Saints have to follow and they are the same in Europe and everywhere else. Compliance with these commandments does not only grant access to the temple but also provides an identity marker for Latter-day Saints as they regulate central cultural practices such as clothing,<sup>23</sup> food, sexuality, performing religious rituals, and adhering to normative standards regardless of where the religion is practised.

These standardised processes control temple access without taking regional and cultural differences into account. The only difference that can be noted is the geographical distance to the temple that members have to cover which privileges some members over others. It is remarkable that with 14 temples and half a million members, Latter-day Saints in Europe are quite well equipped.

### 3. The conspicuous aesthetics of LDS temples

The architecture of Latter-day Saints temples around the globe is marked by a certain distinctiveness and recognition effect. They are often landmarks not only for the Latter-day Saints but also for non-members of the church who live in or travel to the area where a temple is located. One common feature by which many temples are recognisable, not only in Europe but around the world, is the golden figure of the angel Moroni at the highest point of the building, mostly at the top of a tower.<sup>24</sup> In some cases, for example on

---

22 See »Church Updates Temple Recommend Interview Questions, 6 October 2019«, <http://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/october-2019-general-conference-temple-recommend> (accessed February 17, 2022).

23 The temple garment is also called »sacred temple clothing«; the church disapproves of the popular expression »Mormon underwear«. Adult Latter-day Saints wear the garment under their daily clothes to protect them from evil. The LDS church explains the temple garment in detail to prevent any false narratives. See »Sacred Temple Clothing«, <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/media/video/2020-01-0100-sacred-temple-clothing?lang=eng> (accessed August 27, 2021).

24 Angel Moroni also adorns the pinnacle of the tower of the Temple of Rome that was consecrated in 2019, see <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/rome-italy-temple/photo-graphs/#Official-39> (accessed August 5, 2022). Since the presidency of Russel M. Nelson many new or renovated temples don't include the figure Moroni. This modification is one of many that are part of an image change during which the official church symbol has also

the towers of the Bern and Freiberg temples, the angel Moroni was added at a later stage. According to the *Book of Mormon*,<sup>25</sup> in 1827 the angel Moroni lead Joseph Smith, the founder of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints, to the golden plates on which the founding narrative of the Mormons is inscribed.<sup>26</sup>

The following discussion of the European temples in Rome, Bern, and Frankfurt considers three architectural dimensions, namely the area in which they are located, their spatial setting (3.1.), the architecture and exterior (3.2.), and the interior (3.3.) of the buildings. The analysis follows the procedure of a temple visit beginning with a look at the surrounding area of the temple districts from an aerial perspective, and then a discussion of the architecture of the temple building itself as we approach the temple. As we enter the interior, we focus on one specific area, the celestial room. Finally, the field notes of the Frankfurt temple visit (3.4.) will round up this systematic and multisensory walking tour and enrich the analysis with sensory impressions of the temple and its surrounding area.

### 3.1. The spatial setting

Temples are often prominently located in green landscaped areas with no other buildings close by (see figs. 1–3). In this spatial setting, the temple almost seems like an apparition from nowhere. The buildings cannot be overlooked, as they stand out in their isolated setting and with their space-defining form. It almost seems as if they solicit the attention of those passing by or visiting. Visitors perceive the temple instantly without preparation, which creates an impressive surprise effect specifically in Europe where the LDS community and their temples are relatively unknown. A comparison of the setting of different temples reveals some similarities regarding their surrounding area. There is usually a carefully cultivated green area around the temple with paths

---

been changed from Angel Moroni to a Christ figure. See <https://www.ldsdaily.com/world/the-case-of-the-missing-moronis/> (accessed January 3, 2023). I thank my colleague Colleen McDannell for this reference.

25 Joseph Smith translated the text from the golden plates written in »reformed« Egyptian into English in 1829. This translation is known as the *Book of Mormon*. As promised to the angel Moroni, Smith returned the plates to the place where he found them. They were never recovered again. See Smith/Maffly-Kipp, 2008.

26 An overview of the *Book of Mormon*'s content can be found in Hardy 2015, 137–139.



Fig. 1: In Rome, the visitor centre is located opposite the temple. It is larger than the temple as seen here from the aerial view. There is also a meeting house and the distribution centre is nearby, Google maps (accessed August 30, 2021).



Fig. 2: The Frankfurt temple site includes a visitor centre, a meeting house and administrative buildings, Google maps (accessed August 30, 2021)



Fig. 3: The Bern temple area in Zollikofen consists of a temple hostel, a meeting house, and administrative buildings, Google maps (accessed August 30, 2021).

that lead towards it and in a way celebrate the entrance to the temple complex. The temple complex usually consists of the meeting/community house or church where Sunday services are held, the temple itself, and the visitor centre. In some cases, a temple hostel called »patron housing« and administrative buildings, occasionally combined with a family history centre, are also located in the surrounding area. Sometimes, one of the streets adjacent to the temple references the building, such as »Tempelstrasse« in Zollikofen (Bern temple) or »Am Tempel« in Friedrichsdorf (Frankfurt temple), marking the temple as a landmark in the surrounding urban context.

### 3.2. Architecture and exterior

Churches fundamentally differ from temples in their function and meaning in Mormonism. Whereas every person is allowed to enter the church where Sunday service is celebrated, only Latter-day Saints with a temple recommendation are granted admission to temples. Exceptionally, before a temple is consecrated non-Mormons are allowed to take temple tours which are no longer possible after consecration. One might think that open-house visitors to unconsecrated temples would mostly be non-Mormons, but that is not the case. Instead, many Mormon families with children under the age of

eight years participate in these events. The parents introduce their children to this »sacred«, on no account »secret« place, as Mormons always highlight. For them the temple visit is a kind of promise to their children that they will be allowed to enter this building again if they follow the predefined steps of a true Latter-day Saint life.<sup>27</sup>

Some similarities are noticeable in the exterior design of the three temples in Rome, Friedrichsdorf (Frankfurt temple), and Zollikofen (Bern temple) built and consecrated respectively in 2019,<sup>28</sup> 1987,<sup>29</sup> and 1955 (fig. 4). The façade of all three temples – as of the other eleven European temples – is whitish. An exception is the Copenhagen temple which is constructed of brown bricks. In addition to the noticeable white colour, the design of the outside is characterised by rectangular elements, such as the stone cladding covering the surface of all three temples. This geometric element marks the architecture of the buildings in general: round shapes are rarely, if ever, present. The rectangular design and white stone cladding found in these three temples are typical of other European temples, too, and provide an aesthetic recognition element. Notably, the Swedish temple's façade is not covered by rectangular cladding but its architecture follows a similar rectangular design. And the Freiberg and Danish temples use at least rectangular cladding on the outside of the temple tower.

The geometric architecture and white colour communicate perfection, sublimity, and purity. The building's design with straight lines and angles, and especially the pattern of the cladding covering the façade expresses cleanliness and order as if the world's chaos has been locked out of the temple area. The LDS temples create a world of order, righteousness, and perfection, an image that is clearly connected to a Mormon worldview.

While the temple design is noticeably similar throughout Europe (and the world), some stylistic features of a temple might refer to the particular time and place in which they are built. This is the case in the Rome temple where the visitor area includes a rural Italian house as a minor cultural ref-

---

27 The sociologist Melvin Hammarberg (2013) describes in detail what such a Latter-day Saints »quest for glory« looks like.

28 See footnote 24.

29 See <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-23> (accessed August 5, 2022).



Fig. 4: The Zollikofen temple (Bern, Switzerland) was the first Latter-day Saints temple built and dedicated in mainland Europe in 1955. Photograph by the author, 2015.

erence to its Italian context<sup>30</sup> which connects the temple with Italian folkloric culture and its stereotypical architecture, although other differences of regionally typical architecture are not taken into account.

But as the analysis of the temples' exterior and spatial setting shows, there are more commonalities than differences between the temple buildings even if they are built in different eras. Besides the recognition effect, the architecture creates an effect of unity between the buildings that connects them ideologically. Additionally, these stylistic similarities offer a reference point for the members to identify with the place independently of where they visit a temple.

### 3.3. Interior of the temples

The »open space« of the temple sites, where the temple architecture stands out, contrasts with the inside of the temple that is designed in such a way that there is very little natural light and no outside views, with the windows

---

30 For a visual of the visitor centre, see <https://news-ch.kirchejesuchristi.org/artikel/tageder-offenen-t%C3%BCr-im-rom-tempel> (accessed August 5, 2022).

often made of colourful ornamental glass. This clear distinction between inside and outside is disrupted by the colour scheme which again emphasises white and pastel shades and characterises the interior design with furnishings and walls. The colour scheme represents an identifying feature of temples that connects the temple district with the interior: the visitors are prepared to enter a different world to which they are aesthetically introduced through the temple's outside area.

Each temple consists of different rooms on different floors which are related to temple rituals such as baptisms and confirmations of the dead, the endowment ceremony, and family and couple sealings for eternity. In order to be able to perform these essential rituals, all temples need to provide the same rooms. Differences between temples can be seen in their floorplan, building materials, furniture, and interior designs. Nevertheless, the atmosphere in each temple allows for a similar sensory-religious experience that is independent of its geographical location.<sup>31</sup> To provide an overview of a temple's rooms and its rituals, I will briefly discuss the model of the Salt Lake City temple (fig. 5). The model of the Salt Lake City temple shows the different floors that are historically allocated to different and progressive ritual stages. On the lower level or ground floor the baptistry is located. The celestial/world room (left side) and terrestrial/garden room (lower right) are also on the ground floor or first level where the endowment ceremony, consisting of lectures, prayers, anointments, covenants and promises, takes place. In most cases, the celestial room (illuminated and on the middle floor, right side), in which members spend time at the end of their temple visit, is on a higher floor, symbolising the highest level of the ritual progression. Only a few temples have an assembly room located on the top floor of the temple, where solemn meetings with those members in charge of the church organisation take place.

---

31 Even though I tried to capture the interiors of the temples as accurately as possible, it remains difficult. As a non-Mormon and outsider not being able to attend the ritual practices, it is not possible to access the full spatial experience of the temple. Even the descriptions of temple interiors in the literature do not reveal the complex arrangement of the spaces. Although I was able to conduct two temple visits during open houses before their dedication, the tours given by temple workers only included some of the rooms. It was almost impossible to understand and memorise the entire building plan in one tour. Nevertheless, some impressions and insights could be gained from these temple visits and these are set out in this chapter.



Fig. 5: The model of the Salt Lake City temple shows the different temple levels and rooms. The illuminated space is the celestial room. Photograph by the author.

Inside the temples, the light in the different rooms and hallways is warm and bright, without any dimly lit corners. Everywhere, the same high-key light is used that connects the rooms by means of the same luminosity. Although decorations and furniture differ from temple to temple, there are some common characteristics. Comparing the celestial rooms of the Salt Lake City Temple,<sup>32</sup> the Frankfurt Temple,<sup>33</sup> and the Rome temple,<sup>34</sup> it is apparent how a similar atmosphere of »perfection« is achieved in each of the rooms even

32 The Salt Lake City temple in Utah, the capital of the LDS church where the main organisation is located, was opened in 1893. Its decoration and colour schemes are decisive for subsequent buildings; see <https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/salt-lake-manti-temples-update-march-2021?imageView=salt-lake-Celestial-Room.jpg> (accessed August 5, 2022).

33 The Frankfurt temple's furniture is simpler and less decorated but the whiteness of the furniture, the carpet, and the walls is more intense; see <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-8> (accessed August 5, 2022).

34 The most recently built temple in Rome is rather classic and less playful compared to the Salt Lake City temple but the colours are still pastel shades; see <https://content.churchofjesuschrist.org/templesldsorg/bc/Temples/photo-galleries/rome-italy/2019/800x1280/14-Rome-Temple-2160799.jpg> (accessed August 5, 2022).

though they were built in different places and at different times, namely in 1853–1893 (Salt Lake City), 1985–1987 (Frankfurt), and 2010–2019 (Rome). The bright, festive and majestic but also clean and artificially stylised interior design materialises the specific meaning of the room: the celestial room literally symbolises heaven. The room's high ceiling highlights the vertical axes and the connection to the transcendental. After having performed all the mandatory rituals, the members stay in this room to experience God's presence without further rituals; they are expected to sit, pray, and reflect in silence to contemplate what is expected of them after death, namely to live eternally with their husband/wife and family.<sup>35</sup>

The elegantly upholstered furniture with visible wooden elements generally references the (Americanised) Louis Seize style used in the Salt Lake City temple, which serves as a model for other temples around the world, including the European ones, but some adjustments to the tastes of different times and places are noticeable. Thus the furniture of more recently built temples represent a stylistically simplified version of the Louis Seize style of the Salt Lake City temple. Although the interior design of the celestial rooms generally reminds visitors of a six star hotel lobby, there are some differences in shapes and materials but not in the majestic and sublime atmosphere achieved through the uniformly bright lighting, the symmetric arrangement of the furniture, and the similar colours of carpet and walls. One could even describe the celestial room as illuminated. Without any hidden corners that could provide privacy, spending time in this room means being seen by each visitor who has reached this last stage of the rituals in the temple. In this sense the celestial room's brightness serves to strengthen the community experience as they all share the same illuminated atmosphere.

Reflecting on the exterior design of the temple grounds and their interior design, it becomes clear that the majestic embedding of the temples in the landscape, the perfection of the architecture, the artificially bright lighting, and the elegant interior design of the rooms aesthetically connect the three

---

35 There are further rooms in the temple: in the creation room, the members hear and observe the re-enactment of creation. The garden room refers to the state of paradise in the Garden of Eden before original sin. The celestial, terrestrial, and celestial rooms – in exactly this order – represent a progressive unity toward the highest kingdom. For more details from a historical and an ethnographic perspective about the different temple rooms, their meaning, and function see Hammarberg 2013, 188–196.

European temples. The conspicuous commonalities between the European temple buildings can easily be extended to non-European temples. The temple rooms' meaning is the same everywhere, and therefore the same interior style is used, even if it is historically adapted. These similarities guarantee the same religious experience for all visitors, be it in Europe or somewhere else. The temple's setting, exterior and interior do not highlight cultural differences but rather aim at the creation of a spatial-aesthetic unity. The LDS temples are clearly visible on the one hand, and their spatial area separates them from the rest of the world on the other. Their aesthetics makes them conspicuously present in their urban context and at the same time it communicates an exclusivity to which only insiders have access. This ambivalence defines a central feature of the LDS church's religious worldview between unmistakable visibility and religious-practical separation.

#### 3.4. A multisensory experience of an LDS temple visit

In this section, I will draw on my observations during the open house of the Frankfurt temple to extend the aesthetic analysis above, highlighting in particular the sensory experience of the temple interior, supplemented by some impressions of my visit to the Provo (Utah) temple in 2015 as a non-European point of reference.<sup>36</sup>

For my field study at the Frankfurt temple I arrived a little earlier at the Latter-day Saint's community centre where a pianist was quietly playing. One of the many volunteers present briefed me on the spot about the open house procedure without having been asked. I looked into the parish hall and was told to sit in the front row, although all the other rows were empty. As soon as the group was large enough, a missionary couple (about 40 years old) greeted the visitors, and the actual tour began. Two more missionaries, young women with English accents, introduced themselves and announced a video which explained the meaning of the temple in the Latter-day Saint theology for the individual members, and of the individual temple rooms.<sup>37</sup> We were also told to wear plastic shoe covers in the temple in order to protect the carpets (fig. 6).

---

<sup>36</sup> The temple visit in Provo is described in detail in Mäder 2020, 23–26.

<sup>37</sup> The video can be viewed here: »Tage der offenen Tür und Weihungen« <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/temples/open-houses?lang=deu> (accessed September 1, 2021).



Fig. 6: Volunteers help to put on the shoe covers to protect the carpets of the temple. Photograph by the author, 2019.

As noted above, the pastel shades of the interior design of the Frankfurt temple, continuing the colour scheme of the sparkling white façade, intensify the experience of being »elsewhere«, beyond space and time. This impression is reinforced by the fact that from inside the temple it is almost impossible to see the outside world, whether it is day or night, cold or warm. Not only is any outside noise dimmed, but also inside, sounds become muffled to be almost inaudible. This audio and visual experience is further intensified through the carpeting in the rooms which are dense and high piled. They do not only impact the auditory experience by silencing the visitors' movements and steps but they also create a feeling of hovering above the ground when walking through the hallways and rooms. Even during the open house when a lot of visitors were walking through the rooms, it seemed as if the people were almost noiselessly floating. The temple's sound design creates a separation from the loud, noisy outside world and provides a different space not only in terms of its religious significance but also affectively, by reducing the noise coming from the external world. This material, tactile and auditory quality adds to the temple's atmosphere of »otherworldliness«, quiet and peaceful but also a bit sterile and flawless, a world to which only Mormons belong. Walking through the different rooms as a non-Mormon I became particularly aware of this exclusivity. Without reference points in the external world, and without any specific locally influenced interior design ele-

ments, the reference to the European location of the temple shrinks to zero. Instead, the specific atmosphere aims to detach the visitors from the temple's geographical location.

In addition, since the light is similar in most of the rooms, the hallways connecting them, and in the staircases, and without external reference points, it is very easy to lose one's sense of orientation. The building tells the visitors that they are not only smaller but also disoriented without the church officials' guidance. Of course, it is impossible to get lost during an open temple tour because the volunteers continuously guide, observe and keep the group together. Individual temple tours are not envisaged.

Apart from furniture, temples do not include much decoration. This highlights the few paintings in the typical Latter-day Saint's style on the walls depicting scenes from the New Testament and the Book of Mormon. On the wall behind the recommend desk where the members start their temple visit, a painting of a typical Mormon subject is prominently placed.<sup>38</sup>

In my short conversation before the tour, the public affairs representative of the Latter-day Saints Europe located in Frankfurt highlighted the importance of geographic proximity of members to their temples in order to facilitate regular visits and experience of God:

We already assume that sooner or later there will be times when people will reorient themselves. The number of spiritual seekers of meaning is relatively low today, depending on which study you believe. Most are carefree everyday pragmatists.<sup>39</sup>

The representative expressed a cautious but unbroken optimism that one day in the future the people of Europe might again be more interested in a spiritual quest for meaning.

---

38 See <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/frankfurt-germany-temple/photographs/#Official-12> (accessed September 5, 2022).

39 The conversation with the spokesperson took place in Friedrichsdorf (Germany) on September 25, 2019 and has been recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated in English.

#### 4. The end of my walk through Mormon temples in Europe

By »walking« through three European temple areas, I considered their architecture, the landscape in which the buildings are embedded, their interior, and the temple rituals and regulations. I will conclude by summarising the similarities and differences between the temple squares to discuss the ambivalence of Latter-day Saints temples adapting to some degree to their European contexts yet also remaining separated from European culture.

Regarding the similarities between the LDS temples, the recognition factor is key. This is especially important in a European context where the LDS church is less well known than, for example, in the United States of America. This recognition factor is probably even more important for the LDS members regarding the interior rather than the exterior, so that wherever members visit a temple, they feel familiar with the spatial setting. The temple visitors do not need to adapt to any otherness in different European countries, except the language that is a relevant part of ritual.

The temple's outside appearance is important for members and non-members, for those visiting the temple and others who just pass by. It works like a corporate identity that connects the individual temple buildings with the Latter-day Saints church as a global institution. Additionally, the similarities of style and atmosphere result in a similar experience independent of place. Through their uniformity, the temple squares communicate the worldview of perfection, universality, and separation from the world to Mormons and non-Mormons. The uniform design can be understood as the materialisation of the objective of the LDS church's correlation committee (established in 1907) which is responsible for the uniformity in teaching and doctrines including the reconstruction of their history.<sup>40</sup>

But there are also some differences between the buildings. The period from which the buildings originate is partially recognisable and results in some minor variations among the buildings. This is the case with the Bern temple square which reminds one of the style of the 1950s, or the Frankfurt temple with its traces of 1980s architecture. The Italian rural house at the visitor centre in Rome is perhaps the most obvious example of a desire to create a clear cultural belonging. However, these variations are more notice-

---

40 Shippy 2000, 89.

able in the church and community buildings than is the case with the temple's architecture which emphasises uniformity and recognisability. Furthermore, the landscape in which the buildings are set varies based on geography and climate resulting in regional differences of flora and fauna. But again, the natural environment, too, is laid out and maintained in an astonishingly uniform manner. The temples become a part of the natural or landscaped space in which they are located, which is of course defined by its specific situation in a European country. At the same time they are set apart from the natural landscape through their typical architectural type which emphasises geometrical over organic forms.

The temples' specific architecture renders them highly visible in the cityscapes discussed here, staking a claim for a religious community whose origins lie outside of Europe within the public space of Europe and establishing a position from which to contribute – at the very least through its visible presence – to European public discourses, including those about the public role of religion. At the same time, the temples' design emphasises the community's separation from the surrounding world and highlights its universal dimension over against the particular context in which it is placed. Thus the temple architecture suggests a withdrawing of Latter-day Saints from the European context at the same time as they make themselves visible and noticeable.

It seems that the strikingly similar layout of the temples' squares and their interior design is not intended to adapt or contribute to a specific European style. Instead, it seems as if the Latter-day Saints view on Europe is strongly shaped by the community's worldview that is defined and controlled by this organisation and expressed in the universally similar temple architecture. The temples thus generate a global unity that represents the LDS religious worldview and communicates perfection and sublimity. These features of the interior design, the exterior of the buildings, and the surrounding areas communicate a temporal and spatial indeterminacy that fosters universality and unity. In addition, the Latter-day Saints temples' architecture contributes to their staging as representative and conspicuous buildings that attract attention. This is nothing new regarding religious buildings. The practice is also known for many Roman Catholic cathedrals, mosques, and synagogues throughout history. Given post-secular discourses, maintaining, renovating, and even building new temples in Europe seems quite courageous in a

context where religious traditions have become less important in the public sphere and the most prominent new buildings in a city are usually those of large tech corporations, banks, or malls.<sup>41</sup> They represent the new landmarks rather than sacral buildings from religious traditions. But the conspicuous temple areas and buildings of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-day Saints show that they are still optimistic regarding their relevance in contemporary Europe, and that they also dispose of sufficient financial means to invest in generously built temple squares. It testifies to a self-understanding that is evidence of a great conviction of one's own global-religious worldview. It will be intriguing to observe future developments of this ambiguous presence – discussed here with a focus on the architectural, material, and multisensory dimension of their temples – of the Latter-day Saints in Europe.

## Bibliography

- Decoo, Wilfried, 2015, *Mormons in Europe*, in: Givens, Terryl (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 543–557.
- Ellingson, Laura L., 2008, *Engaging Crystallization in Qualitative Research. An Introduction*, Thousand Oaks: Sage Publications.
- Fritz, Natalie/Höpflinger, Anna-Katharina/Knauss, Stefanie/Mäder, Marie-Therese/ Pezzoli-Olgiati, Daria, 2018, *Sichtbare Religion. Eine Einführung in die Religionswissenschaft*, Berlin: De Gruyter.
- Hammarberg, Melvyn, 2013, *The Mormon Quest for Glory. The Religious World of the Latter-Day Saints*, New York: Oxford University Press.
- Hardy, Grant, 2015, *The Book of Mormon*, in: Givens, Terryl (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Mormonism*, New York: Oxford University Press, 134–148.
- Mäder, Marie-Therese, 2020, *Mormon Lifestyles. Communicating Religion and Ethics in Documentary Media*, Baden-Baden: Nomos.
- Mäder, Marie-Therese, 2021, *Das Spanferkel, die Realityshow und die vielfältigen Interaktionsfelder zwischen Medien und Religion*, in: Karimi, Ahmad Milad

---

41 One characteristic of the notion of the »post-secular« is that religious traces still remain: »Post-secularism recognizes the persistence of religion and marks an acknowledgment of religious and secular pluralism. It recognizes the ethical resources and community-building efficacy that religious systems and practices can offer and acknowledges the function of religion in constructing and defending cultural identities. [...]. According to post-secularism, the secularization thesis has been empirically disproven« (Rectenwald/Almeida 2015, 15).

- (ed.), *Religion und Ästhetik. Zur filmisch-seriellen Narration des Religiösen*, Freiburg/München: Verlag Karl Alber, 72–95.
- Mäder, Marie-Therese/Soto-Sanfiel, María T., 2019, »We Are Open-Minded, Tolerant, and Care for Other People«. Comparing Audience Responses to Religion in Documentaries, *Journal of Media and Religion* 18/3, 98–114.
- Pink, Sarah, 2011, A Multisensory Approach to Visual Methods, in: Margolis, Eric/Pauwels, Luc (eds.), *The SAGE Handbook of Visual Research Methods*, London: SAGE Publications, 601–614.
- Rectenwald, Michael/Almeida, Rochelle, 2015, Introduction, in: Rectenwald, Michael/Almeida, Rochelle/Levine, George (eds.), *Global Secularisms in a Post-secular Age*, Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 1–24.
- Shipps, Jan, 1987, *Mormonism. The Story of a New Religious Tradition*, Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Shipps, Jan, 2000, *Sojourner in the Promised Land. Forty Years among the Mormons*, Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press.
- Smith, Joseph/Maffly-Kipp, Laurie F., 2008, *The Book of Mormon*, New York: Penguin Classics, 2008.
- Stark, Rodney, 2005, *The Rise of Mormonism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Thierbach, Cornelia/Petschick, Grit, 2014, Beobachtung, in: Baur, Nina/Blasius, Jörg (eds.), *Handbuch Methoden der empirischen Sozialforschung*, Wiesbaden: Springer Verlag, 855–865.

