

# Forever Into Eternity

## Social Forms of Religion in the Temple Wedding of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

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**Abstract** *The wedding in the temple, known as the “sealing” ceremony, constitutes a pivotal moment in the life of a Latter-day Saint. Beyond the eternal nature of the marriage, the exclusive sacred space of the temple holds profound significance for the couple and their community, accessible only to members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The temple wedding establishes clear distinctions between ‘us’ and ‘them’, delineating boundaries to the outside world and creating social units that embody the cellular principle of social forms of religions. In this particular case, these units manifest as the marital dyad of the couple, fortified during the “sealing” ceremony in the temple. Marriage between a man and a woman represents the most esteemed form of living, providing access to the highest place in heaven. During the wedding, norms and values are not only actively shared but also collectively experienced. Even years later, the event is recalled in intricate detail, with certain experiences akin to the sealing ceremony in the temple. Therefore, the wedding plays a vital role in communitization. Lastly, the wedding reception fosters emotional connections among guests who actively and enthusiastically participate in the event, thereby bringing the social form of eventization into play.*

**Keywords** *boundary making, communitization, eventization, Latter-day Saints, marital dyad, temple, ceremony, video conversations, wedding*

### 1. Introduction: Drawing boundaries within temple ceremonies

In 2008, while journeying through the Western United States, I had my inaugural visit to the Latter-day Saints Temple Square. Back then, my knowledge of Mormonism and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was rather

limited. My initial impression of the place was vivid: the remarkable cleanliness lingered in my memory; a feature particularly noteworthy from a Swiss perspective. Moreover, the noticeable gap, the physical separation between the tourists participating in guided tours and the members of the church, left a strong impression on me (Mäder 2020).

Most of the men were dressed in white shirts with ties and jackets. It appeared that the temple square was segregated into two distinct sections: one designated for the church members and another for the visitors. Initially, I was puzzled by this division, but I later learned that access to the temple is restricted to church members only. It was not until later that I noticed the wall at the bottom of the picture and the deliberate landscaping that created a separation between myself and the guests. This setting clearly delineated a boundary between us, the visitors, and them, the insiders. It became evident to me that within Temple Square, there existed an exclusive group: individuals who stood apart from the broader world, even though the dividing line was adorned with carefully tended plants.

Latter-day Saints, who consider themselves Christians but are not fully accepted as such by all Christian communities, visit the temple to conduct various rites of passage (Van Gennep 2019: 1–14), such as baptism for the dead or couple sealings for eternity. Another important ritual practice is the “sealing ceremony”. Latter-day Saint families who join the church after their children are born will, as they call it, “seal” their family in a temple ceremony for eternity, meaning that the family will continue to be bound together in the afterworld. The same ritual is conducted by couples to be sealed for eternity, meaning that the couple will still be married even after their death.<sup>1</sup> Due to its eternal duration, the Latter-day Saint temple wedding is called the “celestial marriage” (Daynes 2015). The ceremonies, such as the regular temple visit where members perform the “endowment ceremony” in various temple rooms, serve not only as a way to confirm and establish identity among the members but also as a way to create a social distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’.

The present paper centers on one specific rite of passage within the Latter-day Saint community: the temple marriage, specifically the “sealing” ceremony. It addresses three questions: First, what does the temple wedding, the “sealing” of the couple, mean within the Latter-day Saints’ worldview (Fritz et al. 2018: 56–57)? Second, how is the representation of inclusion and exclusion

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1 For more about the Latter-day Saint practices of “sealing” and “eternal marriage” cf. Hammarberg 2013: 171–196; Daynes 2015)

symbolically and practically communicated in the temple wedding and other moments, like the civil marriage ceremony and the reception? Third, which social forms of religion follow from these boundaries of inclusion and exclusion and how are social forms of religion expressed in the temple wedding and its festivities?

The second question claims that the ritual of temple weddings signifies the establishment of boundaries where participants create a distinction between ‘them’ and ‘us’. This approach draws on the ethnographer and sociologist Andreas Wimmer’s understanding of the boundary concept that consists of “everyday networks of relationships that result from individual acts of connecting and distancing” and the social classifications as ‘us’ and ‘them’ (Wimmer 2008: 113). This classification allows the experience of belonging that, according to Heinrich Popitz, is a basic form of social experience. The resulting social units represent the cellular principle of social forms of religion that define the distinctions between ‘us and the others’ by drawing certain boundaries to the outside world (Popitz 1992: 140–143).

In the context of Latter-day Saints, this distinction from others is practiced in the sealing ceremony in the temple.<sup>2</sup> The latter is specifically drastic because the couples are sealed forever beyond death. The collective representation of this shared worldview is expressed, among other ways, in the temple buildings, which are only accessible to members of the church with a temple recommendation by church authorities.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the various temple rituals can be viewed as identity markers used to establish boundaries between the Latter-day Saints and those outside the faith, echoing Wimmer’s analysis:

One divides the social world into social groups – into ‘us’ and ‘them’ – and the other offers scripts of action – how to relate to individuals classified as ‘us’ and ‘them’ under given circumstances. Only when the two schemes coincide, when ways of seeing the world correspond to ways of acting in the world, shall I speak of a social boundary. (Wimmer 2008: 113)

“[S]eeing the world” and “acting in the world” are intertwined and rooted in a particular worldview and distinct practices, among which a wedding can be

2 The temple marriage is an important step in the “Mormon Quest for Glory,” as the title of Melvyn Hammarberg’s monograph reads. Cf. Hammarberg 2013, 253–267.

3 A detailed account of the religious practices in a Latter-day Saint temple can be found in Mäder 2023, 201–202.

included as a specific religious social practice on several levels. Yet, the temple wedding holds significant importance in the worldview of the Latter-day Saints. The couple forms an eternal dyad between husband and wife by making eternally valid promises to each other in the sealing ceremony in the temple to enter the highest degree of heaven (out of three) in the afterlife (Daynes 2015: 334). This eternal dyad can be seen as the smallest social form, according to Popitz (1992: 152–156), in which each individual recognizes the other individual and by doing so creates a social relationship.

Additionally, the wedding also encompasses the community and the wedding guests. They partake in the ritual, listening to the couple's vows and the "sealer's" (the master of ceremony in the temple) words. During weddings collective and often emotional experiences, a strong sense of unity, and personal inclusion are communicated. These experiences contribute to the social form of religious communitization. A wedding transforms "individual experiences into collective experiences and thus makes a constitutive contribution to social forms of religion"<sup>4</sup> (Heiser/Ludwig 2014: 8). In processes of communitization common norms and values are shared, and the social boundary between us and them is strengthened, and a collective identity is generated (Krech et al. 2013: 54).<sup>5</sup> And finally, the support by other church members before, during and after the wedding reinforces a collective practice. It highlights the experience of something extraordinary, emotional bonding and active participation, that belongs to another religious social form, namely the eventization. "Acting and feeling together connects the participants, takes them out of their everyday lives and gives rise to the assumption that they are connected to something bigger", as sociologists Patrick Heiser and Christian Ludwig describe the religious social of eventization (Heiser/Ludwig 2014:10). This collective experience is exemplified, for instance, in group photographs taken in front of the temple. Following the temple wedding, the group congregates on the temple steps for immediate photographs. This moment holds particular significance as photography and videography are prohibited within the temple.

The chapter's questions are considered on the basis of three interviews that form part of a comprehensive interdisciplinary research project. This study employs a multi-methodological approach encompassing 27 narrative-biographical interviews involving both religious and non-religious couples

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4 Translation from German by the author.

5 A detailed account of the religious social form of communitization can be found in the introduction of this volume.

across Italy, Germany, and Switzerland. These video-recorded conversations are shaped by the methodological principles of visual anthropology (Pink 2021: 81–170). They involve couples viewing and commenting on their wedding photos to reconstruct the events of their wedding day. The current chapter centers on three video interviews featuring couples affiliated with The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from Germany, Italy, and Switzerland. It serves as a case study within a broader research sample, where the contextual information becomes pertinent for analyzing the three interviews (Baur/Lamnek 2017; Hering/Schmid 2014).

The contribution is structured in four parts. In this introduction, I have considered the boundary concept and how it is connected to the question of social forms of religion in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (1.). The main part discusses the role of Latter-day Saint temples not only in the wedding ceremony but also as spaces of collective experiences and processes of identity building (2.). Additionally, three conversations with Latter-day Saint couples show how the wedding contributes to the social forms of religion of the marital dyad, communitization, and eventization (3.). Finally, the conclusion (4.) summarises the boundary-making processes taking place during Latter-day Saint weddings and matches them with corresponding social forms of religion.

## 2. Latter-day Saint wedding in the temple

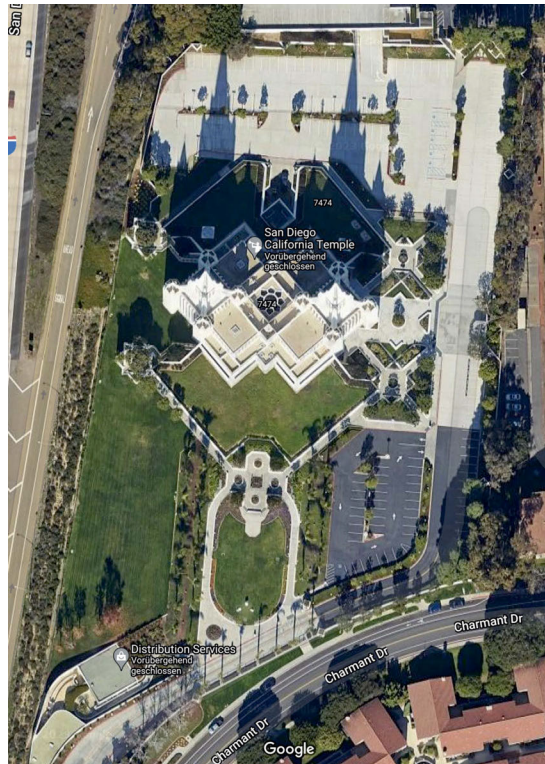
### 2.1 The boundary of the temple area

As previously mentioned, the temple is an exclusive space reserved solely for Latter-day Saints who are baptized, have reached the age of eight, and have acquired a temple recommendation issued by the temple authority (Mäder 2023, 201). This recommendation is followed by an interview with either a bishop or a representative of the church. Within the Mormon worldview, the temple is historically linked to the Tabernacle of the Israelites (Ex 25–31) in the desert and King Solomon's temple in Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup>

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6 There are 179 dedicated temples worldwide. 51 temples are under construction, 98 temples are announced, and six temples are currently being renovated. Cf. <https://churchofjesuschristtemples.org/temples/>.

*Fig. 1: The Google Earth screenshot of the San Diego temple shows the symmetrically arranged area. The two striking towers are recognizable as shadows.*



(<https://www.google.com/maps/place/San+Diego+California+Temple/@32.8662322,-117.2291438,484m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m6!3m5!1sox80dc06d32da29aff:ox3681efiof8a92fa4!8m2!3d32.8665341!4d-117.228771!16zL2ovMGQybDNI?entry=ttu>)

The exclusivity of the temple is also reflected in its architecture and the surrounding grounds, which are deliberately set apart from the adjacent areas. Often, the temple area is arranged within a block, enclosed by streets and hedges. The layout of the buildings and pathways emphasizes a preference for distinctive symmetrical and square architecture, exemplified by the aerial view of the San Diego temple (cf. fig. 1). The spatial configuration of these temple

complexes becomes a distinguishing characteristic (see fig. 2) (Mäder 2023: 202–208).

*Fig. 2: San Diego Latter-day Saints temple.*



(Photo M.-T. Mäder, November 2015)

The temples' predominantly white, square-shaped exteriors establish a visual connection between the individual temple buildings and represent The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints as a global institution. The distinctive temple architecture collectively embodies the church, in alignment with Wimmer's concept, and exudes an air of exclusivity. This architectural expression is further underscored by the surrounding garden areas, which contribute to a somewhat segregating aesthetic. When members visit the temple, they enter into an exclusive realm to which they maintain an emotional and personal relationship that is based on shared norms and values. Temple visits not only reinforce the relationships among the members but also provide a collective identity. These experiences are attributed to the religious social form of communitization. Only the visitor center serves as an inclusive space, although its pristine appearance often creates an atmosphere that seems somewhat isolated from the external world.

## 2.2 Communitization, societalization, and the eternal dyad in the “sealing” ceremony

In addition to the wedding for eternity, other significant rituals occur within the temple. They allow further experiences that support processes of communitization as well as societalization. The latter comes into play because the church strictly regulates these rituals, and assigned temple workers observe the procedures to be carried out correctly. These include sealings of families for eternity, particularly for those families who joined the community at a later stage. Parents and their children are eternally linked in a manner similar to the wedding ceremony. Furthermore, baptisms and confirmations for the dead are conducted within the temple, taking place in the baptismal font typically situated in the temple's basement. The baptismal font is upheld by twelve oxen, symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel. This (presumably) imitates the architectural design of the bronze basin in the courtyard of the Temple of Solomon.<sup>7</sup> Members conduct rituals to baptize and confirm deceased individuals, inducting them as posthumous members of the church.

The temple itself serves as a representation of the cosmology of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, featuring the so-called “telestial”, “terrestrial”, and “celestial” rooms.<sup>8</sup> These rooms symbolize the stages of existence: the telestial represents the world of creation, the terrestrial signifies Earth with the Garden of Eden, and the celestial denotes eternity. During a visit to the temple, Latter-day Saints move through these rooms consecutively. In the telestial and terrestrial rooms, visitors engage with spoken or recorded texts, with the telestial room even presenting a film depicting creation. In the celestial room, members are invited to experience the presence of God without any further instructions.

In the Rome temple, these three rooms are arranged horizontally from left to right on the middle level, with the telestial room on the left, the terrestrial in the middle, and the celestial room on the right, following the order of their cosmological significance (fig. 3).

7 Cf. <https://www.esv.org/resources/esv-global-study-bible/illustration-11-solomons-temple>.

8 The graphic depicting the telestial kingdom appears more akin to an infernal realm, contradicting the Latter-day Saints' belief in the absence of a traditional hell.

*Fig. 3: Model of the Latter-day Saint temple in Rome.*



(photo M.-T. Mäder, February 2023)

At the center of the upper level lies the sealing room, the site for weddings and family sealings. This room is distinctive due to the altar positioned in the center where the couple kneels during the ceremony. Adjacent to the wall parallel to the altar, mirrors are suspended, reflecting each other endlessly. This perpetual reflection serves as a symbol of eternity.

Members informed me in various conversations that temples are replete with symbols consistent across all temple locations worldwide. Latter-day Saints are welcome to visit any temple and will encounter a similar internal building structure and comparable interior design. Additionally, the similarity between the temples allows members to share an emotional and sensational experience that, in turn, fosters global communitization. As access to temples is restricted, non-Mormons (unable to attend a Latter-day Saint temple wedding) are guided to wait in a room adjacent to the temple reception, where on a large screen the wedding ceremony is explained by a member of the governing body of the church (Quorum of the Twelve).

It is notable that all three couples with whom I spoke about their temple wedding vividly recalled the profound significance of the endless mirroring effect during the ceremony. The social form of the dyad represents the cell of re-

ligious communitization and at the same time becomes collective on the level of experience and memory of the wedding.<sup>9</sup>

### 2.3 The temple wedding as reinforcing collective identity

The temple marriage is an integral aspect of processes of communitization within The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. It is exclusive not only spatially but also emotionally, as – in their self-imagination – only Mormons can comprehend the significance of being sealed for eternity. Getting married in the temple holds distinctive importance in aiming for the highest position in the celestial kingdom, as illustrated in a graphic from 1950 (see fig. 4) where the couple will live together in eternity by attaining godhood and proceeding with their procreation forever and ever (Hammarberg 2013: 267). Only these couples will be given access to the highest of the three heavens Latter-day Saints believe in.

The telestial kingdom stands as the lowest, reserved for those who have completely disregarded the moral guidelines outlined by the Mormon faith. The terrestrial kingdom is the second heaven, designated for “The good & honorable but blinded by the craftiness of men,” as described in the image. Ultimately, marriage is essential for the third heaven, “the highest of which is exaltation” (Daynes 2015: 334) as highlighted by the celebratory banner displayed in front of the Salt Lake City temple in the image, but there are other paths into it as well. While several other responsibilities are essential, such as baptism, repentance, adhering to moral standards, paying tithes, and fulfilling duties, marriage holds a preeminent role in attaining the kingdom of heaven and ultimately achieving godhood as a reward. This positive appreciation of the temple wedding draws another boundary inside the Latter-day Saint community. It highlights the dyad between the couple as the smallest religious social form which is the most recognized in the afterlife.

Conversations with three Latter-day Saint couples delve deeper into social forms of religion through the sealing experience and wedding festivities. Highlighting their significance within the context of the dyad, communitization, and eventization.

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9 Interviews with N.N., couples, September 16, 2022 near Frankfurt/M./GE (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8181413>), February 1, 2023 near Zurich/CH (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8248443>), and February 10, 2023 in Rome/IT (<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.8248549>).



videos of religious and secular weddings in Europe communicate norms and values. In the current paper, this question is discussed in the context of social forms of religion, where the sharing of common norms and values stabilizes religious communication and plays an important role in communitization processes (Heiser/Ludwig 2014: 9). The interdisciplinary study applies a multi-methodological approach that includes, among others, the analysis of wedding shows and 27 narrative-biographical interviews (Hopf 2016) with couples from Italy, Germany, and Switzerland who married between 1968 and 2022. Within the research project's framework, the discussions with Latter-day Saint couples hold significance because these couples lack any photographs of their temple wedding.

Remembering the ceremony without visual references forges a unique connection among couples while creating a distance from others who do have photographs of the event. Despite this, their memories of the ceremony remain distinct and vivid. The subsequent analysis of these three conversations delves into how the boundary-making processes of inclusion and exclusion manifest within the memories of the temple wedding.

The three couples were married at different times: The Italian couple wed in the Bern temple in Switzerland in 1977, just two days after their civil marriage at the civil registry in Campidoglio, Rome. The wife was 25 years old, and the husband was 26. Both had converted to Mormonism at a young age after being raised Catholic. They are parents to two children and are now grandparents. The German couple married in the Frankfurt temple in 1989, holding both their temple and civil ceremonies on the same day. The wife was 20 years old, and the husband was 23 at the time of their marriage. Both were born into the church and are parents to four adult children. The Swiss couple exchanged vows in the Bern temple in 2022, following their civil wedding the day before. The wife was 24 years old, and the husband was 25. Both were born into The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

### 3.1 The Italian couple (temple wedding in 1977)<sup>10</sup>

The couple – it was mainly the wife who was speaking while the husband reassured her, repeatedly distanced themselves from the civil wedding during the

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10 The conversation took place on 10 February 2023 at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints visitor center in Rome/IT.

conversation. Both agreed that the civil wedding did not mean anything. It was nothing more than a tedious event, as the wife mentions:

Nothing. Just a deadly effort. The real marriage for us would have been in the temple. We only did the civil marriage because, from a legal point of view, our marriage was valid. Otherwise, there would have been no need. It was nice because it was exciting because we shared all this with our relatives, our friends, and our parents. But while they were congratulating us, we were thinking that the best is yet to come. We are here wishing each other well, but we are married, yes, we are married by law, but our hearts are yet to be married. The chain of love, of which I spoke before, has not yet been bound. And so, the real wedding, for us, was the one up in the temple. The wedding day here in Rome was a terrible effort.<sup>11</sup>

The couple explicitly expressed that their civil ceremony did not feel like the “real wedding”, a sentiment they reiterated multiple times during the conversation. They conveyed that they arranged it primarily for their parents and relatives. Moreover, the post-wedding lunch created an uncomfortable situation as they were expected to toast with the guests, which they refrained from doing, given the Latter-day Saint prohibition of alcohol. This act of abstaining from the toast symbolized their divergence from the group or non-members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and highlighted their sense of not fully belonging to their wedding guests. This deliberate choice served as a means to reinforce their dyad, i.e. their identity as a couple while simultaneously creating a noticeable boundary to the attendees.

Primarily, the wife portrays the civil wedding and subsequent reception as hectic and draining. In stark contrast, the temple wedding the following day is depicted as a quiet and calm occasion. However, the wife emphasizes that the spiritual experience during the temple wedding was indeed exhaustive:

And we just went up [to Switzerland]. Nothing happened there, though, in the sense that the wedding in Zollikofen, like all weddings that take place in the temple, are extremely meaningful. In this specific case, both he and I had never done the path, so on the same day we did the spiritual path, which we talked about earlier, and immediately afterwards we went upstairs and had the wedding. So, it was a really full day for us. Also

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11 Video conversation with NN, spouse, Rome/IT February, 10, 2023. Transcript translated from the Italian by the author.

because, besides the excitement of getting married, there was the coming to know and making covenants and commitments, which were really impactful from a spiritual point of view. And so we were exhausted.<sup>12</sup>

In the wife's representation, the two weddings compete against each other with regard to representation and meaning. The civil marriage proved socially exhausting due to the presence of numerous guests, family, and friends who wanted to celebrate something the couple was not entirely invested in. The great significance of the temple wedding proved to be draining also because it was additionally combined with a customary temple visit that they had not experienced before. This visit had a profound impact on them, as described by the wife: "[...] there was the coming to know and making covenants and commitments, which were really impactful from a spiritual point of view".<sup>13</sup> In 1977, the sealing ceremony was also logistically demanding, because there was no temple in Italy at the time. The Latter-day Saints from Italy and many other countries in mainland Europe had to travel to Switzerland to conduct the diverse temple ceremonies and make covenants with God.

The couple's firm boundary with non-Latter-day Saints, even many years after their wedding, is likely due to their conversion to the church, which sets them apart from the rest of their family and most of their friends who didn't share their worldview. On the one hand, the dyadic relationship between the couple is strengthened through this experience. On the other, they experience a strong feeling of belonging to the Latter-day Saint community even many years after the wedding. The temple wedding becomes part of their identity that they share with the other members and therefore contributes to communitization.

### 3.2 The German couple (temple wedding in 1989)<sup>14</sup>

The German couple acknowledges that the civil wedding serves as the legal prerequisite for the temple wedding, but they also do not find it particularly meaningful. They arranged the civil ceremony simultaneously with the temple wedding and the evening reception. Managing these three significant events in one

12 Video conversation with NN, spouse, Rome/IT, February, 10, 2023. Transcript translated from the Italian by the author.

13 Video conversation with NN, spouse, Rome/IT, February, 10, 2023. Transcript translated from the Italian by the author.

14 The conversation took place 16 September 2022 in a private home near Frankfurt/M./GE

day was stressful, as they recall, and they express a desire to do it differently if given the chance. It is not surprising that the temple ceremony held the focal point amidst this packed day. The husband even remarks that this moment is the only one he vividly recalls from the wedding:

So, the sealing is the only thing I can still remember. [...] It was just – because it's just the ambiance, it's so beautiful. You're there in the temple. You kneel in front of an altar and there are just so many of them, there are opposing mirrors. That means you can see the others into infinity. And that's what a circle does. It's simple. It's just incredibly beautiful.<sup>15</sup>

It is notable that the husband becomes emotional while recalling the ceremony. Another instance of emotional depth in their conversation occurs when they discuss the certainty they had in choosing each other during their dating phase. The husband emphasizes that this decision holds a different significance within their church because it involves choosing for eternity, which, in itself, can be quite intimidating. However, surpassing this fear is rewarding and ultimately brings a sense of happiness. The husband's memories of the sealing ceremony point out again how the Latter-day Saint eternal marital dyad distinguishes itself from other weddings.

Within this conversation, the temple ceremony is revealed not only as a shared collective representation among all Latter-day Saints but also as a collective experience. Both aspects foster connections among its members while creating a sense of distance from non-Latter-day Saints and contribute to community. The husband classifies those who do not belong to the church when comparing the temple with the civil ceremony:

It's just more personal than the registrar reading out his text. We thought it was unspeakable, but that's just the way it is. It is what it is. It was an official who just did his job and that was it. It wasn't very personal.<sup>16</sup>

Similar to the Roman couple the ceremony by the registrar is less valued by the German couple. The husband laughs when he describes the anonymous and almost mechanical civil procedure. It seems that he does not take it seriously

15 Video conversation with NN, husband, near Frankfurt/M./GE, September, 16, 2022. Transcript translated from the German by the author.

16 Video conversation with NN, husband, near Frankfurt/M./GE, September, 16, 2022. Transcript translated from the German by the author.

and judges the work of the official as someone who “just did his job” while the sealer in the temple who is an official chosen by the church authorities gives the ceremony meaning. In contrast, the couple positively remembers details of the sealing ceremony like when “the sun’s rays shine in through the stained-glass windows”,<sup>17</sup> as the wife describes the moment. It is also noticeable that they agree on this very detailed memory which strengthens their marital dyad. The husband says that after this moment the wedding could have been over. The reception was obligatory, but obviously not relevant to them.

It is noteworthy that although non-Latter-day Saints are usually invited to the reception, it is nonetheless exactly this part of the wedding which is less valued by the couple. It shows that the community is prioritized over the “others”, the non-Latter-day Saint members, against which a boundary is drawn. Here not only communitization but also eventization take place by the inclusion of non-members. This also coincides with the experience of the German couple. The wedding reception took place in the church’s community center. Many church members helped with organizing the reception, preparing food and decoration, taking photos, and tidying up again at the end. The Swiss couple, the youngest of the three, could also count on the help of the members. This also turns the wedding as an event into a shared experience during which the Latter-day Saints additionally connect.

### 3.3 The Swiss couple (temple wedding in 2022)<sup>18</sup>

In the case of the Swiss couple the shared experience of the wedding, with other members of the church, was highlighted even more during the conversation. The whole wedding was supported by church members at different moments and revealed the social forms of religious eventization and communitization. The hairdresser who also did the make-up was from the church, the wedding cake was created by the bride’s father who is a professional confectioner. Church members decorated the wedding location of the reception and helped clean up afterward. The photographer was a Latter-day Saint. Additionally, the couple celebrated an extra blessing ceremony at the garden house of a member, a former bishop of the church. The husband describes their relationship as being father-son-like.

17 Video conversation with NN, spouse, near Frankfurt/M./GE, September, 16, 2022. Transcript translated from Swiss German by the author.

18 The conversation took place in the couple’s apartment near Zurich/CH.

The wedding consisted of four different ceremonies or receptions and took place in central Switzerland in 2022. The first wedding was the civil at the registry with 50 guests. The second was the already mentioned blessing ceremony with a reception afterward in the garden of a member with 80 guests. In the evening the newlyweds celebrated with 100 guests, friends, and family members. The following day the couple was sealed in the Bern temple in Zollikofen accompanied by 25 close family members. Some of the guests, only members of the church, participated in all four weddings. The couple sent different invitations to individually assign the guests to one or more of the four celebrations. The management of the different invitations was according to the couple quite complex. Among other things, it was a way to draw boundaries between members and non-members that in turn contributes to communitization.

During the conversation, the couple shared their intricately crafted wedding album encapsulating the entire day, along with a video documenting the evening reception. They explained that the absence of photos from the temple wedding did not bother them, as it felt that they compensated for the lack of temple images with those from the blessing ceremony. Furthermore, numerous photos were taken in front of the temple, featuring the couple, family members, and friends in group shots. The wife expressed a sentiment of regret at not being able to record the words spoken by the sealer, with a slight disagreement between the couple on this matter. She believes the wording was individually tailored for them. However, the husband holds a different perspective, disagreeing with her. To his understanding, the sealer's words during the wedding are consistently the same in every temple wedding. It was noticeable that both of them made a swift attempt to resolve this disagreement during the conversation, almost as if it were inappropriate to hold differing views on the matter. Their marital dyad does not allow different memories in this issue.

When reflecting on the most significant moment of their wedding, the emotional and personal experience of the temple ceremony once again stood out as pivotal:

*Husband:* I had several moments like that. One of them was when I saw her for the first time. Now it's getting real. But the other one was also on Saturday itself then, inside in the temple. And in that room, it has like two mirrors, opposite each other, representing eternity. From this place, where you are, you can look into the mirror non-stop. When I was there with [my wife], I already-

*Wife:* At the end when we were still two?

*Husband:* Yes, yes, exactly.

*Wife:* Everyone left the room at the end. It was really just the two of us sitting there.

*mtm*<sup>19</sup>: Is that part of the ceremony?

*Husband:* That you're alone? No, we just wanted it that way.

*mtm:* To have a moment alone.

*Husband:* Yes.

*mtm:* And did you talk to each other or just soak up the moment-?

*Husband:* More soak up the moment. Maybe one word.

*Wife:* No, not spoken much, just absorbed.

*Husband:* For me, I once worked in the temple for three weeks. That was before the mission. That was 2018. And I often went into that room where the sealings take place, and I used to imagine what that might be like when I was in there. That always gave me a calmness. Just such a nice feeling. You can't compare that with what happened during the day. Because it was even better then. When I think of it like that, I always looked forward to that moment. When I can be in there with my wife, and I can seal myself to her for eternity.<sup>20</sup>

Again, the opposing mirrors in the sealing room are mentioned as an experience of eternity by the husband. Additionally, the religious social form of the intimate dyad shared exclusively by the couple resonates with the experiences of the other couples during the temple ceremony. In this instance, the couple deliberately carved out time for themselves immediately after the ceremony. Despite having four celebrations in total, the temple ceremony stands as the

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19 Interviewer and author of present chapter.

20 Video conversation with NN, husband, near Zurich/CH, February, 1, 2023. Transcript translated from Swiss German by the author.

pivotal event for both, holding significance beyond the other festivities. The sealing for eternity serves as a profoundly unique and deeply personal emotional experience for the couple. Simultaneously, it acts as a source of self-assurance and connection for the community, creating a distinction between them and others. These characteristics solidify as a robust boundary, delineating a clear divide between the Swiss couple and non-Latter-day Saints. The delineation aligns with the concept of boundaries in this scenario and confirms itself as the social-religious form of communitization. The couple's memory of their temple wedding represents an exclusive and highly symbolic practice that can be categorized as a collective experience that is shared with other members of the church.

#### **4. Conclusion: Boundaries and social forms of religion in temple weddings**

In the Latter-day Saints worldview, temple weddings serve as a means of establishing boundaries in the social form of an exclusive religious community, enabling members to distinguish themselves from others. These boundaries manifest in various aspects, including the architecture of the Latter-day Saints temple, its surroundings, and the couples' recollections of their weddings. The dynamics of connection and separation unfold at distinct junctures within the wedding, delineated into the civil ceremony and the temple wedding. This demarcation provides "scripts of action that aid in the identification of 'us' versus 'them' (Wimmer 2008: 113), contributing to a nuanced process of inclusion and exclusion that in turn results in social forms of religion of the bridal couple's dyad, communitization, and eventization. The concluding remarks will concentrate on three pivotal moments identified in the analysis. They answer the underlying question of how boundary-making processes and social forms of religion are expressed in Latter-day Saint weddings.

The initial moment pertains to the perception of the temple building and the collective emotions experienced by its members. The temple holds a central significance as weddings are exclusively conducted in the sealing room within its premises. The temple visit is perceived as a privilege, distinguishing Latter-day Saints from others. Members share a profound connection to this sacred space, fostering a sense of unity among them. The communal emotional attachment to the temple amplifies its impact as a collective representation and identity, which again refers to communitization reinforcing the social classi-

fication of ‘them’ and ‘us’. This boundary contradicts their self-perception as Christians and their desire for a Christian affiliation that should include the whole of Christianity and not just The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. The exclusivity of the temples frequently faces criticism. A common response to this critique is the assertion that the temples are “sacred, not secret”.<sup>21</sup>

The significance of the temple ceremony for couples is the second moment in which the social forms of the dyad on one hand and communitization on the other play a role. They are expressed in collective representations, social classifications as ‘us’ and ‘them’, and the interaction with the community. All three couples treasured their experiences in the sealing room, each in a unique way. The shared ‘mirror experience’ emerged as a common thread, serving as a defining aspect of the temple wedding. Emotional moments were described by all three couples, with the Italian couple expressing feeling “exhausted” due to the intense spiritual experience. Furthermore, it was the first time the Italian couple had entered the temple, experiencing the endowment ceremony for the first time. This dual encounter likely heightened the emotional intensity. Similarly, the German couple vividly recalled their temple wedding. For instance, they intricately described the sunlight streaming through the stained-glass windows of the sealing room. Both emphasized the profound shared emotional moment, noting that everything thereafter felt more like a duty toward their guests. The Swiss couple deliberately approached the temple ceremony, carving out a moment to savor the atmosphere in the sealing room. They scarcely spoke, opting to “soak up the moment”, as they recollect.

Despite these three independent experiences, commonalities emerge. All three couples articulate a perception of something extraordinary during the temple ceremony, rooted in the spatial and sensory elements. This exceptional experience thus becomes an exclusive boundary between the couple and attendees of the sealing ceremony. The couple is drawing an inner boundary – now transformed into an eternal dyad by the sealing/mirroring – separated from everyone else, even other Latter-day Saints present in that room. The third moment of communitization pertains to the wedding reception held outside the temple during which the religious social form of eventization comes into play as well. Once again, the receptions varied, yet shared certain similarities as a collective endeavor. The Italian couple, compelled to celebrate for their parents,

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21 Cf. <https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/eng/new-era/2006/01/how-to-talk-about-the-temple>.

repeatedly underscored that the civil wedding and the ensuing reception were bothersome and held no personal significance for them. They felt estranged from the entire event and explicitly distanced themselves. Similarly, the German couple conveyed that the temple wedding was the highlight of the entire day, echoing the sentiment of the Swiss couple. Unlike the Italian couple, both the German and Swiss couples celebrated with numerous church members, creating a more comfortable atmosphere compared to the Italian couple. Additionally, the German and Swiss couples celebrated in the church meeting house with assistance from fellow members. According to the couples, the members expect and are accustomed to supporting couples in preparing and celebrating their weddings, as humorously noted by the Swiss couple. In this way, not only the temple ceremony but also the reception become a practice of inclusion and boundary-setting for the community in a collective endeavor. Therefore, the wedding reception includes both social forms, namely communitization and eventization.

To summarise, it can be stated that the multiple boundary-making processes within the context of temples and Latter-day Saint weddings unveil social forms of religion at different moments. First, the overarching boundary between outsiders and insiders (us/them) is revealed in relation to the space of the temple building which excludes outsiders. It creates a profound sense of belonging in the temple sealing ceremony and plays a constituting part in the Latter-day Saints' communitization process. From an emic perspective, it makes all the other elements, such as the civil ceremony or various receptions, pale into insignificance for the couples. Second, the ceremony also creates inner boundaries within this "sacred space" within the sealing room, formed around the couple's dyad as the smallest social form, mirrored in eternity. The couples see themselves as a unity for all eternity, distinct even from other LDS members within the sealing room. The third boundary is the common space of the wedding reception – in which LDS members and non-members share the space. In this setting, Latter-day Saints, notably the married couple, seek to express their religious identity (e.g. by not drinking alcohol) in a worldly space by applying the religious social form of eventization. The clearest example of these multiple boundary rings is indicated by the various invitations sent to different ceremonies and receptions, to members and non-members, distin-

guishing between the four ceremonies of the Swiss couple.<sup>22</sup> It shows that communitization may also include non-members for a certain time frame who participate in the event. At the same time, these guests are aware that they are only partly included, which in turn lets both sides experience the boundary during the celebration of the wedding.

Clear and robust boundaries, even multiple boundaries, impact not only insiders but also outsiders of a community. LDS weddings allow intense collective experiences that serve the social forms of religious communitization, the eternal dyad of the couple, and in some moments the eventization of religion. The boundaries established in a Latter-day Saint wedding may therefore also evoke an equal sense of exclusion for those not permitted to enter the inner boundary rings of the temple space.

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22 The model draws on the religious space of the Jerusalem Temple with its gradations of “holiness” increasing the closer to the center one gets of the Holy of Holies. I thank my colleague Sean Ryan for this fruitful input.

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