



# A FINNISH MORMON TEMPLE OR “AMERICA IN KARAKALLIO”? THE ACTIVATION OF A STEREOTYPE AT AN ENCOUNTER OF CULTURES

Kim B. Östman

In the autumn of 2006, Finnish people could acquaint themselves with Mormonism through a public open house at the newly constructed Mormon temple in the southern-Finland city of Espoo. Mormonism is often seen by Finns as an American religion, the image being strengthened for example through the mostly American composition of the Mormon missionary force. The article deals with the place of stereotypes at cultural encounters, specifically discussing the activation of the Mormon-America stereotype in visitors' experiences at the temple. Examples are taken from visitor comments related to arrangements, people, and architecture.

## INTRODUCTION

The construction of the Helsinki Finland temple of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints was completed in Karakallio, Espoo, in the autumn of 2006. At the end of a long-term building project the Church organized an open house at the temple for two and a half weeks in September and October. During that time the public could via guided tours acquaint themselves with the architecture of Finland's first Mormon temple and with the thought world of Mormonism's mainstream. The scene was in many ways set for an encounter of cultures – or a type of tourism<sup>1</sup> – with predominantly Lutheran Finns coming in contact with the religious practice of a Church from abroad. After this

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Walter E. A. van Beek for this observation. For a study utilizing the pertinent tourism framework of “empty meeting places,” see Dean McCannell, *Empty Meeting Grounds: The Tourist Papers* (London: Routledge, 1992).

period of encounters temple doors were closed to others than Mormons living according to their Church's teachings.



Figure 1 Visitors at the Helsinki Finland Mormon temple site 23 September 2006. Photograph by the author.

The birth of Mormonism in the state of New York in the United States in the early 1800s took place in the midst of religious excitement and schism. But “The Church of Christ” movement established by Joseph Smith did not become a new branch of Protestantism. Instead Mormonism – which held itself as the restoration of primeval Christianity – developed to contain elements different from the rest of modern Christianity to the extent that some scholars have compared its development process to the separation of early Christianity from Judaism to its own tradition.<sup>2</sup> One of these elements is the building of special temples that are different from Mormonism’s regular Church buildings. They are used in performing religious ceremonies – such as

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<sup>2</sup> Jan Shipp, *Mormonism: The Story of a New Religious Tradition* (Urbana and Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1985).

endowments and marriages – both for living Mormons and for and in behalf of deceased individuals.<sup>3</sup>

Some of these new elements can be connected to the Church’s country of origin and its culture. One example is Mormonism’s teaching of America as a promised land where Jesus Christ preached after his resurrection and where he will again appear in the future. Another example is the Book of Mormon, which is seen as the spiritually oriented history of a people that lived in ancient America. On the organizational level the Church’s highest leadership is made up almost exclusively of American men, and congregational life around the world resembles American Protestant Christendom.

One of the most common associations that Finnish laypersons make with regards to Mormons are the Church’s mostly American, often dark suited missionaries that speak Finnish with a very clear accent. This image has recently found its way also into Finnish popular culture in the form of an acclaimed novel,<sup>4</sup> which most probably strengthens the image in people’s minds further.

### PURPOSE AND MATERIAL

This article focuses on one of the features that is actualized during an encounter of cultures, namely stereotypes. For the purposes of this article, I define the pertinent “America stereotype” as the connecting of Mormon features to the United States or the portraying of Mormonism as American. As a result of content analysis I will describe some of the connections and ways in which the America stereotype was used when describing visits to the Mormon temple in Espoo during its open house. I view the manifestations of this stereotype as individuals’ subjective portrayals of their own reality.

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<sup>3</sup> Kim Östman, “Nykyajan kristillistä esoteriaa: Katsaus mormonismiin temppelitradiitioon,” [Contemporary Christian Esotericism: An Overview of Mormonism’s Temple Tradition] *Teologinen Aikakauskirja* (Finnish Journal of Theology), vol. 111, no. 5 (2007), 430-440. Most of the English translations from Finnish or Swedish in this article are mine.

<sup>4</sup> Juha Itkonen, *Myöhempien aikojen pyhiä* [Latter-day Saints] (Helsinki: Tammi, 2003).

My purpose is not to discuss to what extent the America stereotype holds true more generally, even if this kind of somewhat controversial research related to the truthfulness of stereotypes is done in some circles.<sup>5</sup> It is probably impossible to objectively define the amount and significance of American features in Mormonism; the task would become further complicated when it is difficult to objectively define even what is “Finnish culture” and what is “American culture”. In any case, analyzing the ways the America stereotype is used can give further understanding of the processes that are activated as cultures encounter each other and through which an individual structures and portrays his or her reality. It also sheds more light on the ways in which some Finns think of Mormonism as an American religion.

My source material consists partly of over 100 articles or stories from newspapers, magazines, and radio, mostly from September and October 2006, published all over Finland. The greatest interest in the temple project was naturally displayed in the media of the capital city region around Helsinki. However, bulletins by the Finnish News Agency or other writings on the Mormons were published in general newspapers around Finland and in professional, religious, and other magazines or periodicals. Some articles are general descriptions of the open house, while others delve more deeply also into personal thoughts around the visit experience.<sup>6</sup>

As more personal material I have also used blog and discussion forum writings of individuals that have visited the temple; these have been found through internet search engines. The publication threshold

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<sup>5</sup> Ruth Illman and Peter Nynäs, *Kultur, människa, möte: Ett humanistiskt perspektiv* [Culture, Human, Encounter: A Humanistic Perspective] (Lund: Studentlitteratur, 2005), 109.

<sup>6</sup> I have collected much of the printed material by monitoring media outlets closely, especially during the public open house in late September and early October 2006, assisted by several interested individuals located around Finland. Additionally, I have been in contact with Mormon Church Public Affairs in Finland in order to benefit from that office’s findings. The resulting database seems more than sufficient, especially as the purpose of this article is not to give a full overview of all media attention to the new Mormon temple, but rather to give examples of the occurrence of the America-stereotype.

of these comments is obviously lower than that of printed material, and the group of writers is different. The writing often takes place from behind a screen name and thus gives greater freedom to express opinions very openly.

From the point of view of source criticism one has to remember that this article does not look for the objective truth concerning the degree or nature of Mormonism’s Americanness. Instead, the center stage is taken by individuals that are subjective and that utilize stereotypes. Both journalists and bloggers are unique individuals and interpreting subjects who have their own individualized backgrounds and values.<sup>7</sup> Thus the descriptions considered in this article are also individualized and shaped by the person’s own background. Regardless of the variety of individual backgrounds it is interesting to notice that the America stereotype is activated in many descriptions. Regardless of how scarce the material is, this finding supports the assumption that the stereotype has deep roots in the Finnish thought world.

In the following I will first discuss the nature of stereotypes and their significance at cultural encounters, which the open house is an example of. After this I will analyze those areas in which the America stereotype is activated in the experiences of the writers. These are areas in which the observer interprets and explains the state of things with Mormonism’s connection to the United States. Finally I will briefly discuss the implications of this stereotype from the point of view of Mormonism itself.

#### STEREOTYPES AND THEIR SIGNIFICANCE AT ENCOUNTERS OF CULTURES

It is difficult to precisely define the concept “culture”, and scholars in fact propose many different kinds of definitions. Some see cultures as “coherent packages of customs, routines, and practices that

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<sup>7</sup> Ruth Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden: Skildrade erfarenheter av kulturella möten i internationellt projektarbete* [Creating Boundaries - Crossing Boundaries: Depicted Experiences and Interpretations of Cultural Encounters in International Industrial Project Work] (Åbo: Åbo Akademi University Press, 2004), 33.

can be clearly separated from other cultures.”<sup>8</sup> Other definitions see culture as something which is commonly shared, which governs people’s behavior, and which is traded in society from one generation to another in both direct and indirect ways.

From the point of view of the humanities, an encounter of two different cultures is above all about the encounter of two different individuals, not the encounter of “packages” or categories.<sup>9</sup> The essential point is that the individual sees himself or herself in some meaningful way as different that the other person that is encountered. During the open house of the Mormon temple the individuals encountered were the tour guides and the Mormons that were in a tent answering questions and discussing their faith in private conversations at the end of the tour. The open house can be seen to some extent more as a chance to get acquainted with Mormonism’s religious culture and its thought world than as a personal encounter of cultures, but it has clear features also of the latter.

The significance of a pondering, multifaceted and interpreting human being is great in cultural encounters. According to some scholars this has not been taken into account sufficiently in what are called essentialistic viewpoints of cultural encounters.<sup>10</sup> Researchers of intercultural communication that utilize this viewpoint seem – at least according to their critics – sometimes to think that the encounter of two culturally different individuals will be successful as long as the coefficients of difference-depicting variables are weighted correctly in an encounter equation.

On the other hand, scholars that use a hermeneutic viewpoint and at the same time question the essentialistic viewpoint emphasize the central status of the multifaceted person and his attitudes, interpretations, and personal interest towards the other person in these kinds of encounters. This kind of view has also been compared with the difference between Martin Buber’s dialog-philosophical thoughts on I-Thou

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<sup>8</sup> Illman and Nynäs, *Kultur, människa, möte*, 26.

<sup>9</sup> Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden*, 53.

<sup>10</sup> Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden*, 42-44.

and I-It attitudes. In this case the I-Thou attitude refers to a real encounter, mutual understanding, and dismantling of boundaries, whereas I-It refers more to observing the other person from a distance and drawing boundaries.<sup>11</sup>

Constructing and dismantling boundaries plays an important role at encounters of cultures. Each individual has a private interpretation concerning cultural attachments and the most central features of his or her own culture. As a result, everyone also has an individualized image of the foreign and of the other. Encounters of cultures can thus not be defined objectively from the outside, but rather the actualization of such an encounter depends on each person's own boundaries and views.<sup>12</sup> It is common to define one's own cultural group as normal and use it as a reference point against which to contrast a group that is seen as foreign and in some way different.<sup>13</sup>

One of the tools that is activated when cultures meet and boundaries are defined is the use of stereotypes. A stereotype can be defined as painting other people and especially groups of people with a few simplifying brushstrokes.<sup>14</sup> The inner diversity of the foreign group is dimmed and certain values and attitudes are connected with the group.<sup>15</sup> Stereotypes can be seen as a cognitive necessity – with their help an individual produces meaning and creates order into the world's variety and disorder. They are inherited through the social environment and are thus socially constructed images of the other.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand each individual has a unique world of thought and experience. Thus the socially constructed stereotypes develop individualized modifications and significances.

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<sup>11</sup> Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden*, 50. See also Martin Buber (transl. Walter Kaufmann), *I and Thou* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1970).

<sup>12</sup> Illman and Nynäs, *Kultur, människa, möte*, 51.

<sup>13</sup> Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden*, 99-100.

<sup>14</sup> Stuart Hall, *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices* (London: Sage Publications, 1997), 249.

<sup>15</sup> Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden*, 98-99.

<sup>16</sup> Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden*, 107. See also Illman and Nynäs, *Kultur, människa, möte*, 106.

Worchel and Rothgerber see stereotypes as multidimensional.<sup>17</sup> They divide a stereotype into five components, namely content, categorization, homogeneity, interpretation, and significance. In the case of the America stereotype dealt with in this article, content has to do with Americanness and thereto connected traits, while the object category is Mormons and Mormonism. The image of the inner homogeneity of the Mormon group varies. It is clear, however, that for example the Mormon missionaries in Finland promote a rather one-sided and homogenous image, as the Mormons are otherwise very little in the public eye. The interpretation and significance of the Mormon stereotype vary from person to person, these probably being the most individualized components of stereotypes.

Some scholars think that increased information concerning the target group reduces the amount of stereotypes connected to it. This is not necessarily true, as will be seen later. Stereotypes can become self-fulfilling prophecies, where an individual sees reality through the stereotypes that have taken root and does not notice features that put them in question.<sup>18</sup> The stereotype then functions as a kind of hypothesis that is confirmed through the experiential and cognitive input gained during the encounter.<sup>19</sup>

On the other hand one can ask whether an encounter has actually even taken place in this kind of a situation.<sup>20</sup> Then again, one also has to ask whether there actually is something to the stereotype; it is most likely wrong to suppose that stereotypes never have any connection to reality. As was mentioned earlier, however, this question is not central to this article.

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<sup>17</sup> Stephan Worchel and Hank Rothgerber, "Changing the Stereotype of the Stereotype," in Russell Spears, ed., *The Social Psychology of Stereotyping and Group Life* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1997), 87ff.

<sup>18</sup> David J. Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping* (New York: The Guilford Press, 2004), 222-224. See also Illman and Nynäs, *Kultur, människa, möte*, 107.

<sup>19</sup> Schneider, *The Psychology of Stereotyping*, 199.

<sup>20</sup> Illman, *Gränser och gränsöverskridanden*, 131.

### THE ACTIVATION OF THE “AMERICA STEREOTYPE”

In the following I will through a few examples look at the ways in which the America stereotype was activated in connection with the temple open house. First I will bring up people’s comments about the general arrangements of the open house. After this the comments focus on observations regarding Mormons as people. Finally I will discuss comments related to the Mormon temple as a building.

#### ARRANGEMENTS

The local arrangements of the open house were mainly in the hands of Finns, although the general instructions came from the United States.<sup>21</sup> Work was done for over a year to raise the public’s interest, partly also in Mormon congregations around Finland. Comments mentioned here are mainly concentrated on the period of the open house on the temple lot itself.

Some individuals paid notice to the instructions that the Church gave to interested visitors in advance. These included among other things a request for the visitors to behave and clothe themselves respectfully and not to smoke on the temple lot. One person – who had not visited the temple – connected these kinds of instructions to Americanness: “As far as the instructions being given literally and in a foolproof manner goes, it has to do with the religion’s America-rootedness. Just like in other American instructions (in the style ‘do not dry the cat in the microwave oven’) – even unwritten rules are written down so that cultural clashes could be avoided as far as possible.”<sup>22</sup>

The open house was probably the greatest effort that Finnish Mormons have undertaken so far, and they have received much commendation for the successful arrangements. It is interesting to note,

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<sup>21</sup> As an anecdote that illustrates the universality of the Church’s guidelines, a Danish scholar of religion who had visited the open house of another European temple remarked to me that the Helsinki Finland temple open house organization and tour that I had described in a conference paper sounded exactly like what he had experienced earlier.

<sup>22</sup> Voimahali forum, 20 September 2006. URL: <http://www.voimahali.fi/vh/showthread.php?t=66260> (accessed May 2007).

however, that some visitors connected the Finnish arrangements with Americanness: “The Americans are splendidly competent at handling large crowds punctually and efficiently and so that the crowd feels that everything is going like a dance and a good feeling prevails. The bunch who certainly also today is waiting for entrance there is kept in control very well, and the atmosphere is upheld in a really professional manner.”<sup>23</sup>

“Finns would have a lot to learn from Yankee-rooted crowd handling skills!” another visitor exclaimed.<sup>24</sup> Again it is difficult to define objectively what Finnish crowd handling on the one hand and American crowd handling on the other hand is like. Regardless of this some visitors, possibly in the form of a self-fulfilling prophecy, brought up the America stereotype when evaluating the general arrangements of the open house.

### MORMONS AS PEOPLE

Persons belonging to local Mormon congregations can usually not be distinguished on the street for example on the basis of clothing or other external matters. The Finnish image of “a Mormon” has thus often become a male, dark suited, nametag-bearing foreign missionary that speaks Finnish with an accent. “Many of us have certainly seen these American boys that are well dressed and who come and talk with you and who always behave themselves in a very nice and friendly manner”, stated a radio reporter that was interviewing a Finnish Latter-day Saint.<sup>25</sup> “Two serious young American men in dark suits. That is the presupposition when one goes to interview missionaries of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints”, wrote another reporter.<sup>26</sup> The stereotype was shattered to some extent, however, when he was met with two female missionaries, one of whom was French. During the open

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<sup>23</sup> Ylen aikainen, Yle Radio Suomi, 3 October 2006.

<sup>24</sup> Mikä ikä?! blog, 1 October 2006. URL: <http://arru.vuodatus.net/blog/256408> (accessed May 2007).

<sup>25</sup> *Radiohuset* [The Radio House], Yle Radio Vega, 13 October 2006.

<sup>26</sup> “Saarnaaja kulkee myös hameessa,” [Preacher Walks also in Skirt] *Helsingin Sanomat*, 21 July 2006, A10.

house visitors met Finnish Mormons and thus gained a partly new image of the Mormon Church in Finland.

Especially during the press conference organized in the beginning of the open house there were in attendance foreign Mormon leaders in addition to Finnish Mormons, however, in practice Americans. “The organizing party was in its customary manner dressed in black suits,”<sup>27</sup> wrote one reporter, while another’s eyes caught “dark suits, a whole group of Americans from Salt Lake City. ... A group of visitors mostly from the USA testifies of the temple’s significance.”<sup>28</sup> In their speeches to the press these “churn out in the beyond-the-puddle style what felt like an unending amount of thank yous.”<sup>29</sup> In a video that briefly introduced temples the “interviewees did not spare superlatives as they praised the temple – – But to a Finn the style was somehow alienating”, wrote a theologian that visited the temple.<sup>30</sup> Some features that are connected to Mormons are thus dark suits, unending thank yous and superlatives. To some, these traits seem to an extent un-Finnish.

The Mormon tour guides that were present could be described as “formally clothed clean-faced youngsters” and “pearl-necked smiling women.”<sup>31</sup> “The guides were Finnish,” wrote one person, but the Amer-

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<sup>27</sup> “Emävale-ekumeniaa,” [Duplicit Ecumenism] *Sanansaattaja*, vol. 131, no. 40 (5 October 2006), 2.

<sup>28</sup> “Tung utanpå, prålig och glittrig inuti,” [Heavy on the Outside, Fancy and Glittery on the Inside] *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 20 September 2006, 4.

<sup>29</sup> “Valoa kansalle Amerikan malliin: Suomen ensimmäinen mormonitemppeli häikäisee prameudellaan,” [Light for the People in the American Way: Finland’s First Mormon Temple Dazzles with Its Glitter] *Iltalehti*, 20 September 2006, 12-13.

<sup>30</sup> Private e-mail to the author from a theologian that visited the temple, 24 September 2006.

<sup>31</sup> Lupiini blog, 7 October 2006. URL: <http://lupiini.blogspot.com/2006/10/myhempien-aikojen-pyhi.html> (accessed May 2007).

icanness came through again at some point: “at every bend there was somebody gesticulating who spoke only English!”<sup>32</sup> ”

An American man clothed in a dark suit” guides a recently arrived reporter in English, and ”along a strip of 20 meters I meet at least three young men speaking broad American English.”<sup>33</sup> Without evaluating the objective truthfulness of the depiction one can generally note that the Church itself also gave stimulus for the America stereotype by using foreign and particularly American personnel in addition to Finnish Latter-day Saints.

### ARCHITECTURE

One clear object for activation of the America stereotype was the architecture of the temple. According to some visitors the temple’s style differed greatly from mental images associated with Finnish spirituality. For example one student wrote that the temple was “an impressive Yankee-style spectacle” whose rooms brought to mind the American television series “The Bold and the Beautiful.”<sup>34</sup>

Another student felt that the entrance to the temple was a secret route to the props of the same television series and considered the quiet moment in a room furnished with a large chandelier and artificial flowers as absurd.<sup>35</sup> A Catholic person visiting together with his spouse wondered whether some Americans really consider heaven to be like a hotel lobby.<sup>36</sup> Another religious person wrote that ”for me it would take some getting used to calm down in the holiest room that with regards

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<sup>32</sup> Lepakkolaakso forum, 26 September 2006. URL: <http://lepakkolaakso.net/keskustelu.php?act=rthrd&gpid=20&thrdid=4016> (accessed May 2007).

<sup>33</sup> ”Valoa kansalle Amerikan malliin”, *Iltalehti*, 20 September 2006, 12-13.

<sup>34</sup> ”SatO vieraili Espoon uudessa mormonitemppelissä,” [SatO Visited the New Mormon Temple in Espoo] *Karhunkierros*, no. 3/2006, 4.

<sup>35</sup> ”Myöhäisen illan pyhyys,” [Late Night Sanctity] *Groteski*, no. 3/2006, 8-9.

<sup>36</sup> Katkirkko forum, 5 October 2006. URL: <http://www.katkirkko.net/fi/?go=comment> (accessed May 2007).

to its furnishings and style reminds one of many Yankee hotel lobbies and meeting rooms – –.”<sup>37</sup>

A born-again Christian writer described the temple with the words "sturdy Church sugary in the American way",<sup>38</sup> and a reporter thought that "the whole is undeniably 'American' and has little in common with cool Nordic or austere Finnish design."<sup>39</sup> In the depiction of a radio reporter that temple's interior was "very American, there are deep carpets and shiny thick panels, light and space and decorations like in a luxury cruiser or a top hotel or in Hollywood props."<sup>40</sup> Another reporter "felt like smiling, even though the temple is a fine building. There is just something a bit too American to it."<sup>41</sup> A comparative religion student thought the visit was an impressive experience, but "in all its blingbling-Americanness the temple was a bit humoristic."<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Körtti forum, 7 October 2006. URL: <http://www.h-y.fi/foorumi/viewtopic.php?p=14161> (accessed May 2007).

<sup>38</sup> "Imelää sisustusta ja outoja menoja," [Syrupy Furnishings and Strange Rites] *Elämään*, vol. 78, no. 11 (2006), 23.

<sup>39</sup> "Tung utanpå, prålig och glittrig inuti," *Hufvudstadsbladet*, 20 September 2006, 4.

<sup>40</sup> Ylen aikainen, Yle Radio Suomi, 3 October 2006.

<sup>41</sup> "IHAN vähän amerikkalaista," [JUST a Little American] *Vartti* (Espoo), 24 September 2006, 6.

<sup>42</sup> "Muovikukkia kaikkein pyhimässä: Mormonitemppeli avasi ovensa uskontotieteilijöille [sic]," [Plastic Flowers in the Holy of Holies: Mormon Temple Opened its Doors to Researchers of Religion] *Samsara*, no. 2/2006, 16-17.



Figure 2. “Light for the People in the American Way,” reads the headline of an article in the nationwide tabloid newspaper *Iltalehti*, 20 September 2006.

One open question at this point has to do with whether the architecture of the Mormon temple really is American. At least it can be said to differ markedly from the buildings of the Lutheran Church. But is it specifically American? Or does the assessment of some visitors have to do with the pre-existing America stereotype through in a new area? One example of the significance of presuppositions is the comment shedding light on one visitor’s background: “The Church mouse became acquainted with the Mormons as a child. Already then he got the impression that it is an American religion. This view was strengthened today. Down to the plastic flowers everything was kitsch.”<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Rotankolo blog, 30 September 2006. URL: <http://rotankolo.blogspot.com/2006/09/small-talkia-temppeliss.html> (accessed May 2007).

In this opinion the expectation and the accompanying stereotype have clearly been verified. The childhood experience together with "confirmation bias" produces a self-fulfilling prophecy. In comments that evaluate the architecture it is also interesting to note that the mental association with Americanness is additionally often presented in a negative light. The building that represents deep sacredness to the Mormons may be thought of as humoristic, sickeningly sweet or absurd. The Finnish-influenced variations of temple architecture – such as depictions of pine leaves or a forest-lake mural – which were noticed by some other visitors, remain in the background in these descriptions.

### DISCUSSION

Encounters of cultures are personal and unique processes that can be evaluated on the deepest level only by the individual in question. In the limited scope of this article it can only be generally said that either there is at least "a kernel of truth" to the observations, or then the activation of the stereotype has to do with a mistaken assessment. Both views have their supporters among stereotype researchers.

What, then, is the wider significance of this stereotype of Mormonism's Americanness? The leading hierarchy of the Mormon Church is aware that American features are connected to the Church in peoples' minds. To some extent the Church is trying to get away from this image and – in some cases – stigma. At least some Church leaders see the Church as being at a point where it is time to remove features that are characteristic of the United States and irrelevant to the rest of the world.<sup>44</sup>

Although not all open house visitors gave comments related the Americanness, it is clear that the stereotype of Mormonism's Americanness is still alive in Finland. It is difficult to change stereotypes that have taken root. They become part of customary action and thought patterns that guide an individual's way of viewing and evaluating the surrounding world. The Church's perceived cultural connection to Americanness to some extent also binds the Church's proselytizing suc-

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<sup>44</sup> "An LDS conference outside the U.S.?" *Deseret News*, 3 April 2007.

cess to the general opinion about the United States. When the Latter-day Saints began regular proselytizing in Finland after the Second World War the general opinion regarding the United States was positive, but nowadays the situation is different. This may have an effect on Mormon missionary work in many parts of the world.

It is thus clear that the activation of the kind of stereotypes discussed earlier is not only of academic interest. The image of Mormonism (and every other organization, group, and nation) is tied to stereotypes, accompanying attitudes and the power structures they uphold. The nature, rootedness, and prevalence of stereotypes thus have great significance for the Mormon Church's own efforts as it seeks to become more international. Perhaps most importantly, they have significance to every Finn that belongs to a minority religion such as Mormonism as he or she interacts with people belonging to the majority culture. An individual's subjective and stereotype-utilizing image of the other and of the foreign governs actions and attitudes, not the more complex reality that lies behind the veil of otherness.

### CONCLUSION

To a person acquainted with the Mormon Church it is clear that the Church contains features that emphasize the significance of the United States on the level of both practice and theology. The degree and meaning of these features is a different matter, however. The Church has changed and become more international especially after the Second World War – at least as far as membership distribution goes. In any case the stereotype of Mormonism as an explicitly American religious movement is part of the Finnish thought world. This image is strengthened through the Church's mostly American missionaries, as the Church's Finnish members and features are relatively invisible in the public eye. Visitors at the Helsinki temple open house were met with a somewhat interesting discrepancy, however: on the level of individuals they met Finns, Mormons that looked like ordinary neighbors and workmates.

For some visitors the stereotype of Americanness was strengthened for example through the temple's architecture and the arrangements of the open house. Others paid attention to other things and did not speak out on the potential Americanness.<sup>45</sup> It is difficult to say to what extent the reaction to the open house had to do with people's advance knowledge and earlier images of Mormonism on the one hand, and on the other hand to what extent it was an evaluation of an experience that began from a relatively clean table.

Was the second party of the encounter a Finnish Mormon temple in Espoo or the colony of an American religion in Karakallio? Both options would seem to be interpretations that are justifiable based on subjective experiences at the open house. Each person is a unique individual that creates and crosses boundaries and that interprets culture and personal cultural attachments in his or her own way. Therefore no general final answer to the question exists. One can only give a guideline for further research: pick a visitor and probe deeper.

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<sup>45</sup> "100 kommenttia temppelin avoimista ovista," [100 Comments From the Temple Open House] *Liahona* (Finland edition), vol. 59, no. 4 (2007), K13-K16.