

PRELUDE TO
A SECOND MISSION:
THE POSTWAR PERIOD
IN ITALY, 1945-65

The return of the Mormons to Italy in the second half of the twentieth century was a product of a complex set of circumstances, including the geopolitics of the Cold War, the economy of postwar Europe, and changes within both the Mormon and the Catholic hierarchies and their respective ideologies and objectives. As much as these larger forces, however, the actions of a number of key individuals played an important part in the events that culminated in the first missionaries being sent to northern Italy in 1965 and the formal reopening of the Italian Mission in 1966.

Changes in the Italian Political and Religious Landscape

The postwar years in Italy were a time of great political transformation and attendant turmoil. Following the cessation of hostilities, a referendum voted an end to the kingdom and the creation of the Italian Republic. The first order of business for the

new state was the creation of a constitution, and one of the central issues concerned the position of the Roman Catholic Church and the new government.¹ Though the matter engendered much debate, in the end the principles of religious plurality and equality, as well as the separation of church and state, were enshrined in the constitution of 1948. It also guaranteed religions the right to meet publicly and to proselytize openly.² These rights ultimately had important implications in the Mormon Church's decision to return to Italy.

In theory, while the new constitution codified the principles of religious plurality and liberty it also preserved the basic outlines of the Lateran Accords, including the enshrinement of Roman Catholicism as the official religion of the Italian state. Thus there was an inherent tension between the new constitution and the Accords, with the result that in practice religious liberty was often circumscribed, and the Vatican continued to exert a significant influence on postwar political affairs. The relevant articles of the constitution were interpreted in a way that diminished the separation between church and state and created what one scholar has described as "a complete lack of religious liberty." The result was that minority religions in Italy continued to encounter official discrimination, just as they had under Fascism.³ Indeed, one scholar has argued that Italian religious minorities experienced more "systematic harassment" in the 1940s and 1950s under the Christian Democratic regime than they had under the Fascists.⁴

1. P. Vincent Bucci, *Chiesa e stato: Church-State Relations in Italy within the Contemporary Constitutional Framework* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1969), 5–33; Luciano Musselli, "I rapporti chiesa-stato e la questione del concordato dalla liberazione alla costituente: uno studio sulle origini degli articoli 7 e 8 della Costituzione," *Il Politico* 52 (1987): 621–39.

2. Raffaele Pettazzoni, *Italia religiosa* (Bari: Laterza, 1952), 140; Donald Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy: Economy, Society and Politics Since 1945*, 2nd ed. (New York-London: Longman, 1997), 215; Pietro Gismondi, "I Patti Lateranensi e la costituzione," *I problemi di Ulisse* 15 (1980): 73–78.

3. Sergio Lariccia, *Stato e chiesa in Italia, 1948–1980* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1981), 12–14; Leicester C. Webb, *Church and State in Italy, 1947–1957* (Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 1958), ix, 24–25, 27; Homer, "LDS Prospects in Italy," 142.

4. Pollard, *The Vatican and Italian Fascism*, 111.

The postwar was a time of Catholic “triumphalism” that endured “as late as 1960.”⁵ Ecclesiastical involvement in political affairs was tolerated, and indeed encouraged, as Cold War tensions began to settle over Western Europe. The Catholic Church was particularly active in matters regarding the role of the Italian Communist Party in the postwar political landscape.⁶ The close relationship between the church and the Christian Democrat Party, which came to power following the war and dominated Italian politics into the 1980s, also contributed to the Vatican’s influence.⁷

The Catholic Church’s involvement in civil affairs was widespread and often controversial in the first years of the new republic. For example, the battle over civil marriage became a *cause célèbre*, in part because of high-profile cases involving marriages between Communists and Catholics, which the church condemned.⁸ As for religious pluralism, some individuals and officials lobbied strongly to prevent evangelism of any sort. The influential Jesuit periodical *Civiltà Cattolica* regularly editorialized on the issue of religious liberty: one piece contended, “In a state where the majority is Catholic, the Church must ask that error never be legalized, and if other religious minorities exist, that these be allowed to exist only *de facto*, without enabling them to disseminate their beliefs. . . . In a country where the dissidents represent an exiguous minority, and where the State shows laudable propensities toward the true religion, total liberty for all denominations and beliefs simply cannot be invoked.”⁹ Similarly, in 1954 *L’Osservatore Romano*, the official mouthpiece of the papacy, decried the “intensification of Protestant propaganda, usually of foreign origin, which has the

5. John Pollard, “The Vatican, Italy and the Cold War,” in *Religion and the Cold War*, ed. Dianne Kirby (Houndsmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003), 112.

6. Lariccia, *Stato e chiesa in Italia*, 12–15; Webb, *Church and State in Italy*, 48; Domenico Settembrini, *La chiesa nella politica italiana, 1944–1963* (Pisa: Nistri-Lischi Editori, 1964), 275–317.

7. On the relationship between the Christian Democrats and the Church, see Gianni Baget-Bozzo, *Il partito cristiano al potere: la DC di De Gaspari e di Dossetti, 1945–1954*, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (Florence: Vallecchi, 1974).

8. For a discussion of one such case, see Bucci, *Chiesa e stato*, 34–61.

9. Bucci, *Chiesa e stato*, 94; Settembrini, *La chiesa nella politica italiana*, 320.

purpose of sowing pernicious errors in this country. . . . We would invite all parish priests, church organizations and members of the flock to watch out assiduously for manifestations of the same and inform the competent authorities with all due alacrity.”¹⁰

In what one contemporary scholar described as a “climate of disapproval and discrimination,” non-Catholic sects experienced significant interference. Pentecostals, who had been particularly targeted in Fascist times, actively tested the limits of religious toleration, and in response their churches were shuttered, religious meetings were regularly closed down by police, and requests for permission to meet or proselytize were refused.¹¹ Jehovah’s Witnesses were also targeted, as in a 1954 attack by a crowd that had been incited by a local priest. Others experienced similar difficulties, including groups of Protestant American servicemen who were harassed and even closed down by police.¹² Despite such difficulties, however, these non-Catholic sects experienced some growth during the postwar period, including a Mormon splinter group, the Bickertonites, which established a community in Reggio Calabria that grew to about 150 members before relocating to Cala Gonone, Sardinia.¹³

This situation in which church and state interests were closely and often uncritically intertwined endured until the mid-1950s, when political and economic events in Italy and abroad began to shift, which ultimately favored a more liberal interpretation of the constitution on matters of religion and a gradual withdrawal of the church from the political arena.¹⁴ A key factor in this change was the election of 1953, in which the Christian Democrats lost the parliamentary majority they had won in 1948. In response,

10. “Italy,” 1982 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, 210.

11. Pollard, “The Vatican, Italy and the Cold War,” 112.

12. Pettazzoni, *Italia religiosa*, 136–38; Bucci, *Chiesa e stato*, 83–88, 95; Settembrini, *La chiesa nella politica italiana*, 321; “Italy,” 1982 *Yearbook of Jehovah’s Witnesses*, 198–202.

13. Massimo Introvigne et al., eds., *Enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia*, 3d ed. (Turin: Elledici, 2013), 484–85; Tourn et al., *You Are My Witnesses*, 275.

14. Salvatore Abbruzzese, “Religion and the Post-War Generation in Italy,” in *The Post-War Generation and Establishment Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. David A. Roozen, Jackson W. Carroll, and Wade Clark Roof (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 213.

the party began to distance itself from the papacy and exhibited a willingness to work with the political left. The same year saw the creation of the Constitutional Court, which was charged with reviewing the complex landscape of Italian laws enacted since unification. This included a reexamination of religious laws, church-state relations, and the status of non-Catholic religions. Over the next decade, the Constitutional Court published a series of decisions that effectively abrogated the core of many laws passed during the Fascist era that were intended to control Italy's religious minorities. The court struck down laws limiting the dissemination of newspapers, manifests, pamphlets, and other forms of publicity. In a landmark judgment, the court found that the Fascist-era law used in 1955 to convict a Church of Christ missionary from Texas for affixing a sign reading "Chiesa di Cristo" on the exterior of a meetinghouse was unconstitutional.¹⁵

Alongside these political developments, there was also some small but growing interest in Mormons that was evident in postwar Italy. In 1955 Mormons appeared for the first time in a storyline in the widely popular Italian comic series *Tex*, which was reprinted several times over the next decade.¹⁶ In 1961, a more scholarly treatment of the LDS Church, Thomas O'Dea's *The Mormons*, was published in Italy. Occasional newspaper articles also appeared in the 1950s, which further served to introduce Mormonism to an Italian audience that was almost entirely unfamiliar with it.¹⁷

Another important factor leading to the Mormon return to Italy was the evolution of attitudes within Roman Catholicism. The Second Vatican Council, held from 1961 to 1965, was decisive in this matter. In contrast to the conservative and interventionist reign of Pius XII (1939–58), the short papacy of John XXIII (1958–63) produced a "radical re-evaluation of the role of the church

15. Norman Kogan, *A Political History of Postwar Italy* (New York: Praeger, 1981), 8–11; Lariccia, *Stato e chiesa in Italia*, 19–26; Paul Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 254–75; Bucci, *Chiesa e stato*, 73–80, 94–100; Homer, "New Religions in the Republic of Italy," 207–8.

16. Gianni Bono, *Guida al fumetto italiano*, 2nd ed., vol. 2 (Milan: Epierre, 2003), 1897; Michael W. Homer, "From Sherlock Holmes to Godzilla: The Mormon Image in Comics," *Sunstone* 160 (September 2010): 71.

17. Homer, "The Church's Image in Italy," 108, 114 n. 155, 157.

in Italian society and politics.” This included opening toward the political left, as well as the abandonment of “the interventionist political role” the church had maintained since 1861. Disengagement and reserve were the pillars of the new pope’s Italian policy: he was more interested in the universal mission and “spiritual and pastoral role” of the church and ecumenicism than in local Italian political affairs and anti-Communist crusading.¹⁸ This stance had significant implications not only politically, but also on the religious climate, which had been so hostile to non-Catholics since 1929.¹⁹ One of the central debates of Vatican II was the question of religious liberty, particularly in Roman Catholic countries. The famous declaration *Dignitatis Humanae*, which recognized the liberty of religious conscience of all humanity, was promulgated on the final day of the council.²⁰

While clearly significant, there is a tendency to overstate the influence of Vatican II on the Mormons’ decision to return to Italy.²¹ Legally, Mormon missionaries could have reestablished a presence at any time after the end of World War II, and by the mid-1950s it is clear that the political environment would have allowed their return. Additionally, Mormon preparations to return were already well under way before the start of Vatican II. That said, there is no question that the council affected and perhaps accelerated the decision. It primed a broader reexamination in Italian society of attitudes towards religious pluralism and liberty, contributed to a progressive secularization and laicization of Italian

18. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 259–61; Lariccia, *Stato e chiesa in Italia*, 28; Maria Elisabetta de Franciscis, *Italy and the Vatican: The 1984 Concordat between Church and State* (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), 70; Robert J. O’Donnell, “The Church Learning and the Church Teaching: Vatican II and the Liberal Tradition of Religious Freedom,” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 29 (1992): 399–401.

19. Peter Hebblethwaite, *Pope John XXIII: Shepherd of the Modern World* (Garden City: Image Books, 1987), 356–69; Giuseppe Mammarella, *Italy after Fascism: A Political History, 1943–1965* (South Bend, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1966), 319.

20. M. C. Casella, *Religious Liberalism in Modern Italy* (London: The Faith Press, 1966), 23–29.

21. Bruce A. Van Orden, *Building Zion: The Latter-day Saints in Europe* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 184.

society and political life, and produced a change in the attitude of political authorities vis-à-vis religious minorities.²²

The Changing and Expanding Global Stance of the LDS Church

Without the changes in the political and religious landscape of postwar Italy, the return of Mormon missionaries and the reestablishment of church institutions would have been difficult. These Italian developments coincided with evolving attitudes and practices within the Latter-day Saint Church, which were also central to the decision. These changes were rooted in events of the early twentieth century, but gained momentum in the years following World War II, which produced a new wave of evangelical enthusiasm and expansion that saw the postwar Mormon Church transformed from a marginal, regional American religion into a movement on the cusp of becoming “a new world faith.”²³

The vision of Mormonism as a worldwide movement was not new, of course. It was rooted in the teachings of Joseph Smith, who had sent out missionaries from the church’s inception. This practice was continued by his successors, especially after 1850, with varying levels of success. The postwar period, however, saw a variety of “historical forces” come together to produce a marked change in the church’s international commitment.²⁴ Many sensed that a new era of growth was beginning: the *Improvement Era* editorialized in 1948, “Surely a new day is dawning for the Church, and a spiritual awakening is at hand. Out of the terrible agony of war and its disconcerting aftermath may come a greater hope, a deeper faith, and a firmer hold on the everlasting things.”²⁵

22. Lariccia, *Stato e chiesa in Italia*, 27–33; Homer, “New Religions in the Republic of Italy,” 203–12.

23. Stark, “The Rise of a New World Faith,” 18–27; Rodney Stark, “So Far, So Good: A Brief Assessment of Mormon Membership Projections,” *Review of Religious Research* 38 (December 1996): 175–78. On the debate surrounding Stark’s famous prediction, see, among many works, Reid L. Neilson, ed., *The Rise of Mormonism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2013).

24. Whittaker, “Mormon Missiology,” 463–64; Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 565.

25. “The Church in Europe,” *Improvement Era* 51 (July 1948): 467.

This recommitment was evidenced in the expansion of the missionary effort. During World War II, there were well under a thousand missionaries in the field at any given time. By the end of 1946, there were 2,294 total missionaries, with 311 in Europe; by 1950, over 5,000 missionaries were in the field, 1,200 of them in Europe. In France and Japan, former missions were reopened, and new ones were established in Hong Kong and Uruguay. These developments were only a prelude, however, to the 1950s, when “the Church made dramatic strides in every direction and laid the groundwork for genuinely becoming an international faith.”²⁶

The international shift of Mormonism was a product of a variety of factors, including the postwar boom, the increasing internationalist bent of the US government, and the broader religious revival of 1950s America.²⁷ During his long tenure, church president David O. McKay (1951–70) was especially committed to missionary work and expanding and strengthening Mormonism outside North America.²⁸ He was uniquely qualified to lead the church into a new age of internationalism. As a young man he served a mission in Scotland and later was president of the European Mission; as a new apostle he was deeply influenced by the two years and the 56,000 miles he traveled visiting all the church’s missions and many areas where it did not have a presence.²⁹ As prophet he traveled more widely than any of his predecessors and visited Saints throughout the world.³⁰

26. Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 545, 548, 553, 558; *Deseret Morning News 2005 Church Almanac*, 635.

27. David A. Roozen, Jackson W. Carroll, and Wade Clark Roof, “Fifty Years of Religious Change in the United States,” in *The Post-War Generation and Establishment Religion: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, ed. David A. Roozen, Jackson W. Carroll, and Wade Clark Roof (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995), 60–65.

28. James B. Allen, “On Becoming a Universal Church: Some Historical Perspectives,” *Dialogue* 25 (March 1992): 14–15. Also Gregory A. Prince and William Robert Wright, *David O. McKay and the Rise of Modern Mormonism* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2005), 358–79.

29. Reid L. Neilson, ed., *To the Peripheries of Mormondom: The Apostolic Around-the-World Journey of David O. McKay, 1920–1921* (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2011).

30. Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*; James B. Allen, “David O. McKay,” in *The Presidents of the Church*, ed. Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 295–97, 306; Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition*, 233; Cowan,

A 1952 trip to Europe produced an epiphany for McKay, who observed, "Today, I realize the responsibility of this Church to proclaim the Gospel is world-wide, now that the means of transportation and communication are such we are only a day, in time of travel, from the European nations. . . . The members of the Church here at home should realize more clearly the loyalty and devotion they owe to their fellow members in Europe." Following another extended international trip, McKay articulated his vision in a general conference address. He stressed the need "to put forth every effort within reason and practicability to place within reach of Church members in . . . distant missions every educational and spiritual privilege that the Church has to offer."³¹

McKay's statements were not simply evangelical rhetoric. He organized stakes in the South Pacific, Asia, Latin America, and Europe. He oversaw the construction of the first temples outside North America, in New Zealand, Switzerland, and Great Britain. In an effort to strengthen local church units he reasserted the policy discouraging church members from gathering to Utah. McKay also made a significant push to reemphasize and expand the missionary effort. During his presidency, missionary numbers increased sixfold, numerous international missions were established or reopened, proselytizing techniques were standardized and improved, and increased funding was earmarked for the missionary program. Indeed, perhaps his most famous statement is a phrase familiar to all Mormons: "Every member a missionary."³²

The success of these efforts is evident in the numbers: during McKay's presidency the church presence expanded from 50 to 128 nations, membership tripled, "the number of stakes had grown

The Church in the Twentieth Century, 99; Hugh J. Cannon and David O. McKay, *Around the World: An Apostolic Mission, Prelude to Church Globalization* (Provo, UT: Spring Creek, 2005).

31. David O. McKay, *Gospel Ideals: Selections from the Discourses of David O. McKay* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1998), 578–84; Allen, "On Becoming a Universal Church," 14; Allen, "David O. McKay," 303.

32. Allen, "On Becoming a Universal Church," 14–15; Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 567–72, 606–7; Arrington, "Historical Development of International Mormonism," 17; Allen, "David O. McKay," 297–98; Arrington and Bitton, *The Mormon Experience*, 263.

more than two and a half times, the number of missions had more than doubled,” and the percentage of the membership living outside North America grew rapidly.³³

The internationalization of the church during the McKay administration was key in the decision to reopen Italy. Indeed after the war, Italy was one of the areas where church leaders were particularly interested in reestablishing a presence. In a 1947 editorial in the *Deseret News*, McKay emphasized the “universality of the gospel” and reported that “there are those who are praying that the way will soon be cleared for missions in Hungary, Italy, and Russia.”³⁴ During his presidency he also made other specific references to Italy.³⁵

Others echoed this view. In a 1956 conference talk, Henry D. Moyle, a counselor in the First Presidency, again pointed to the progress being made among European immigrants in South America as a stepping-stone toward sending missionaries “into Italy, into Portugal, into Spain”; indeed some converts had already returned to Europe expressly to share the gospel with their families.³⁶ Spencer W. Kimball, the apostle and future church president, reported meeting “thousands of Italians in the Church” in South America and that they were “leavening the lump” in their homelands.³⁷

Another key figure in the push to return to Italy was James Barker. Descended from the original Waldensian converts, Barker served a mission to Switzerland from 1901 to 1904, and studied at the Collège de France and the Sorbonne. Upon his return to Utah, he became a noted teacher and university administrator, built an international reputation as a linguist,³⁸ and served in many eccle-

33. Allen, “On Becoming a Universal Church,” 15; Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 560–65, 606–10; Allen, “David O. McKay,” 275.

34. McKay, *Gospel Ideals*, 109–10.

35. David O. McKay, *Secrets of a Happy Life*, ed. Llewelyn R. McKay (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1960), 145–47.

36. Henry D. Moyle, in Conference Report, October 1956, 114.

37. Spencer W. Kimball, in Conference Report, April 1959, 26–29.

38. James Louis Barker Papers, MS 611, box 1, Special Collections and Archives, J. Willard Marriott Library, University of Utah; Jean de la Garde to JLB, 6 January 1952, MS 4000, Church History Library. See also James L. Barker, *Apostasy from the Divine Church* (Salt Lake City: Kate Montgomery Barker, 1960), v–vii.

siastical callings, including two tours as mission president—in Argentina (1942–44) and in France (1947–50).³⁹ During this latter mission, he had oversight for Italy, and he began informally to investigate the possibility of reopening his ancestral homeland. In 1947, he traveled to Torre Pellice with two officials of the Utah Genealogical Society and obtained permission from the moderator (administrative leader) of the Waldensian Church to microfilm genealogical records. The Society had contracted with a Roman firm to do this before the war, but hostilities broke out before work was begun. In 1948, the Genealogical Society microfilmed over eighty thousand pages of records.⁴⁰ When Barker returned to Utah, he stated in the 1951 general conference, “I sincerely pray for the blessings of the Lord on the world, that peace may be restored (we now have war) and that no further wars will break out, that the Gospel may be carried to the rest of the world and in particular to Spain, to Italy, to Greece, to the Mediterranean countries, countries that were once the only ones where missionaries worked in the propagation of the Gospel and wherein were the early centers of the Christian Church.”⁴¹

Following these remarks, Barker met with McKay, who directed him to pursue the possibility of opening a branch of the church in northern Italy with officials at the Italian embassy.⁴² Barker did not act on this assignment, which led McKay to send him a “gentle reminder” the following year, but it seems that the

39. “S.L. Crash Kills Educator, March Injury Claims 1,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 May 1958, 15, 20; “Argentine Mission Head Appointed,” *Improvement Era* 45 (September 1942): 446; “French Mission,” *Improvement Era* 49 (January 1946): 30; “Speakers Review Achievements of Dr. Barker at Funeral Services,” *Deseret News*, 7 June 1958, 5; Archibald F. Bennett, “The Vaudois of the Alpine Valleys and their Contribution to Utah and Latter-day Saint History” (student paper, Brigham Young University, 1960), 15.

40. James Barker to E. P. Cardon in Colonia Dublán, Mexico, 28 November 1926, MS 4000, Church History Library; “Reopened French Mission History,” MS 4000, 7–13; Bennett, “The Vaudois of the Alpine Valleys,” 1–17; Archibald F. Bennett, “The Vaudois Revisited,” *Improvement Era* 51 (January 1948): 12–14, 56–58; Bennett, “Triumph in the Alps,” 227–29.

41. Barker, in Conference Report, October 1951, 46.

42. Kate Montgomery Barker, *In Memory of James Louis Barker* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Library, 1964); “The Church Moves On,” *Improvement Era*, January 1946, 30.

combination of the political situation in Italy and the impact of the Korean War on missionary numbers ultimately stalemated the initiative.⁴³ In 1958, McKay again assigned Barker to begin work on reopening Italy, but once again the effort was stymied, this time by Barker's untimely death in an automobile accident.⁴⁴

Despite this setback, interest in Italy continued. The same year Barker was killed, Elder Harold B. Lee visited both Greece and Italy to investigate "the question of the future possibilities of missionary work." In Rome, he met with the American ambassador, James Zellerbach, who offered to "do whatever might be possible to aid us in getting established as a church in Italy," and recommended that if the church decided to make the move, "it would be wise to 'come in the front door'" by obtaining legal recognition.⁴⁵

Italians Converted outside Italy

While the decisions of church officials in Salt Lake were central in the decision to return to Italy, we should not discount the importance of ground-level developments far from church headquarters. As Kimball, Moyle, and other church leaders indicated, the conversion of Italian immigrants played an important role in this process. The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the unprecedented migration of millions of Italians to North and South America, and within Europe. In their adopted lands, a small number of these immigrants converted to Mormonism, and when they returned to their homeland, their contacts with the central church helped keep Italy on the minds of church leadership.⁴⁶

43. David O. McKay to James L. Barker, 10 March 1952, MS 4000, Church History Library. On the impact of the Korean War draft on missionary work, see Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 569, 571.

44. Funeral Services, June 2, 1958, 32–34, MS 4000, Church History Library; "S.L. Crash Kills Educator, March Injury Claims 1," 15, 20; "Speakers Review Achievements of Dr. Barker at Funeral Services," 7 June 1958, 5; Bennett, "Triumph in the Alps," 229; Bennett, "The Vaudois of the Alpine Valleys," 14.

45. Harold B. Lee to the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve, 25 November 1958, MS 3209, Church History Library.

46. Ballard, in Conference Report, October 1926, 37; Stoof, in Conference Report, April 1936, 87–89; Barker, in Conference Report, October 1945, 69–71;

The first record of immigrant Italian converts returning to Italy is that of the Valeri family, who had immigrated to Switzerland at the turn of the century. In 1926, Marianna and her three children—Caterine, age nineteen; Eugenia, age eleven; and Vincente, age nine—joined the church, and her husband eventually converted in 1940. In 1935, Vincent Valeri enlisted in the Italian navy as a radio operator and was stationed briefly in Sicily before being allowed to return to Switzerland for family reasons following the Italian invasion of Ethiopia. He returned to Rome in 1936 with his sister Eugenia, but again quickly returned to Switzerland for health reasons before immigrating to Columbia.⁴⁷

Switzerland, which had a large Italian immigrant population in the early twentieth century,⁴⁸ was also the home to another early Italian convert: Fabio Cagli came from a Jewish family with roots in Ancona dating back to the Middle Ages. In 1938, he fled to Lausanne, Switzerland, because of Mussolini's anti-Semitic racial laws, where he began a course of study in medicine. In 1944, he came into contact with the small Latter-day Saint community in Lausanne, and on 7 May he was baptized in Lake Léman. He became an active participant in the branch and was ordained a deacon. In September 1945, he married Ella Chappuis, the daughter of Henri Chappuis, whose family had been the mainstay of the Lausanne Mormons for over three decades.⁴⁹ The newly married couple moved to Bologna, where they were the only Italian members in Italy in the years immediately following World War II. Although isolated, the Caglis remained in contact with the French mission and welcomed missionaries who passed through Bologna

Richards, in Conference Report, October 1948, 144–51.

47. "Test of Faith," *Improvement Era* 46 (February 1943): 112, 118; French Mission, Presidents' Files, 1–8 December 1936.

48. Robert F. Foerster, *The Italian Emigration of Our Times* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1919), 171–72.

49. *Bulletin mensuel d'informations*, French Mission, Presidents' Files; France-Switzerland Mission, Lausanne Branch, Manuscript History and General Reports, LR 4746-2, Church History Library; Lausanne Branch, France-Switzerland Mission, General Minutes, LR 4746-11, Church History Library; Swiss District, French Mission, Minutes 1942–1945, LR 3038-21; France-Switzerland Mission, Lausanne Branch, Manuscript History and General Reports, LR 4746-2, Church History Library.

or the occasional Latter-day Saint who came to study in Italy, before they eventually returned to Lausanne.⁵⁰

The most notable Italian convert in this period encountered the church outside of Italy, but did not join until many years later. Vincenzo di Francesca, whose conversion was dramatized in a 1987 LDS film, *How Rare a Possession*, was born in 1888 in Grateri, Sicily, near Palermo. In 1905, at age seventeen, di Francesca followed an older brother and migrated to New York City.⁵¹ He was a Protestant, and according to a somewhat embellished autobiographical recollection composed near the end of his life, while in New York he studied for the ministry. Following completion of his course of study in 1909, he was engaged by a congregation of Italian Methodists in New York City. The following year, while traveling to visit a sick congregant, he found a discarded copy of the Book of Mormon in a trash can. The book lacked a cover and title page, so he did not know its provenance. However, after reading it, he became convinced of its truth. He later described this experience: "I felt my body become cold as the wind from the sea. Then my heart began to palpitate, and a feeling of gladness, as of finding something precious and extraordinary, bore consolation to my soul and left me with a joy that human language cannot find words to describe."⁵²

Di Francesca began incorporating elements from the book into his Methodist sermons, which—not surprisingly—gave rise to controversy. He was directed by superiors to destroy the book, which he refused to do, and eventually, after several interventions, in 1914, he was stripped of his position as pastor. That same year,

50. James Louis Barker Papers, 30 June 1948, MS 4000, Church History Library; "First Meeting of Church Held in Italian in This Century," *Deseret News*, 20 December 1950, 13; Robert West, "Italy and Spain in 1951," LDS World-Gems; Zurich Mission Reports, March 1953; "Bologne," *L'Etoile*, January 1951.

51. Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at New York, New York, 1820–97, Microfilm T715 Roll 599, 1905, 19, National Archives, Washington, DC, www.ancestry.com.

52. Vincenzo di Francesca, "I Will Not Burn the Book," *Ensign*, January 1988, 18–21; Don Vincent di Francesca, "Burn the Book," *Improvement Era* 71 (May 1968): 4–7.



Vincenzo di Francesca was a native of Gratteri, a mountain village in northern Sicily. Courtesy of James Toronto.

di Francesca returned to Italy to serve in the army at the outbreak of World War I. He fought on the Italian front, was wounded, and claimed that his discussions with other soldiers concerning a group of pacifists in the Book of Mormon resulted in ten days of bread and water rations.⁵³ At the war's conclusion, di Francesca returned to New York briefly, reconciled with his former congregation, and went as a missionary to New Zealand and Australia, where once again his unorthodox ideas resulted in his expulsion.

Di Francesca returned to Sicily and in 1930 finally learned the title of the book, and he began corresponding with various Latter-day Saint leaders who sent him literature and a first edition

53. Vincenzo di Francesca, Foglio matricolare, N. 21250—Distretto di Cefalù, Comando regione militare sud centro documentale di Palermo, Palermo, Italy.



*Left: Vincenzo di Francesca (center) with unidentified couple at the Swiss Temple.
Courtesy of Church History Library.*

of the Italian Book of Mormon. Despite his isolation, di Francesca translated several items of Mormon literature, which he distributed among friends and family. Because of his outspokenness, he developed a reputation for eccentricity. Several times church officials arranged to meet with di Francesca in Italy and to baptize him. However, transportation challenges and political events thwarted these attempts. It was not until early 1951, forty-one years after he had first read the Book of Mormon, that the president of the Swiss-Austrian Mission, Samuel Bringham, baptized di Francesca. Despite suffering the effects of old age and poverty, in 1956 he traveled to the newly dedicated Swiss Temple. Following the reopening of Italy in 1965, di Francesca received several visits from missionaries, but he remained effectively isolated until his death in November 1966 at seventy-eight. He was buried in the village cemetery, but only on the condition stipulated by local clergy “that his LDS books not be buried with him as he had requested.”⁵⁴

Another small group of early converts arose around Pietro and Felicità Snaidero, in Comerzo, near Udine in northeastern Italy. The Snaideros immigrated in the 1920s to Cannes, France, where Pietro worked as a stonemason. They joined the Pentecostal Church and then were introduced to Mormonism in 1949 by their daughter, who had already converted. The Snaideros returned to Italy in 1951 and were baptized in a swimming pool in Bologna by Fabio Cagli. They were very open about their new beliefs, which attracted some negative attention: one local religious leader called

54. Don Vincenzo di Francesca, “Burn the Book,” MS 12191, Church History Library; John Duns, Vincenzo di Francesca Collection, MS 13163, Church History Library; Vincenzo di Francesca to Ortho Fairbanks, 12 March 1966, MS 9290, Church History Library; John Martin Neil, Reminiscences about Vincenzo di Francesca, 1945, MS 12237, Church History Library. See also “Pres. Bringham Baptizes First Convert in Sicily,” *Deseret News*, 28 February 1951, 12–13; Zurich Mission Reports, vol. 12, 28 April 1956–2 May 1956.



Left: Pietro and Felicità Snaidero. Courtesy of Noel Zaugg.

the elderly Mormons “poisoned snakes” and discouraged parishioners from meeting with them. Others, however, respected them for their commitment. A village priest who met regularly with Pietro commented “that he wished all his parishioners had [his] integrity.” The Snaideros’ openness eventually attracted additional converts: Santo Beltrame was baptized in 1951, followed several years later by Luigi Pittini (sometimes written Pittino), and eventually Giovanni Morandini in 1963. The group transformed a small room in the Snaideros’ house into a chapel for their Sunday services, where they sang, prayed, and “[took] turns reading out of the Book of Mormon and the Bible and discussing what we have read.” Despite their isolation, the group met faithfully for years; Pittini rode his bike several miles “in snow or rain” every Sunday despite his advanced age and only missed once in eight years. The group occasionally attended church conferences in France, and in 1958, the Snaideros were sealed in the Swiss Temple. When Ezra Taft Benson held a conference in Aviano in late 1964, he singled out the Snaideros and Pittini “as being pioneers in the Church in Italy.”⁵⁵

Another early member was Roma Bortotto. Born in Susegana near Treviso, Bortotto moved to England at age nineteen after she contracted rheumatism from her labor in a silk factory, where she had worked nine hours a day, six days a week since the age of ten. In England, she worked as a domestic for a time, before

55. Daniel Belgique, Oral History, 3 August 2006; Steve Bule, “Pioneers in Italy: the Beginnings of a Zion Society,” talk during Young Single Adult Education Week, Verona, Italy, 1–4 May 1997, 7–10; Richard L. Jensen, “Profiles from the Past: Pioneers in Italy,” *Deseret News*, 9 May 1981, 16; Elder Daniel Belgique to Paul Kelly, 29 April 1964, MS 13788, Church History Library; Barbara T. Jacobs, “Ye Have My Promise,” *Improvement Era* 70 (May 1967): 38–40; Zurich Mission Reports, 10 March 1962; Paul Hamilton Kelly, Journal, 1962–69, MS 13788, 22–26, 34–38, Church History Library. On the Snaideros and Pittini, see also John Duns Jr., Oral History 500, 11, Church History Library; Zurich Mission Reports, 6 December and 15 January 1962. Other examples of early converts include Alessandro and Adelia Lucchi, Vittorio Galligaris, and Giovanni Ottoboni: Zurich Mission Reports, 23 April 1963; Zurich Mission Reports, 24 April 1963; Toronto, “Italy,” 556–58; Zurich Mission Reports, 20 August 1959; “From the Church Editor’s Desk,” *Deseret News*, 11 March 1967, 6.

finding a better-paying position in a hospital. While living in the hospital's dormitory, she met a young French woman who had joined the church in France. After her conversion in 1955, Bortotto moved to Switzerland to work, and several years later, in 1960, she was called to serve in the Swiss Mission.⁵⁶ Her primary duty was to help missionaries who were working with Italian-speaking investigators and to translate church materials into Italian. She also played a key role in the negotiations to open Italy to missionary



Roma Bortotto. Courtesy of Roma Bortotto.

work. Following her mission (two and a half years, including a six-month extension), she returned to Italy and was active in the servicemen's district and branch in Vicenza. Two years after her mission, she married and moved to the United States.⁵⁷

Servicemen Branches

While small numbers of Italians were encountering the church outside of Italy and then returning home, Mormons in the United States military also played an important role in the opening of Italy. In the two decades following World War II, a number of Mormons served tours of duty throughout the peninsula, and small church units of men and women, and eventually their families, were established to serve their needs. These represented the first viable and enduring church units in Italy since the closing of the first mission, and they set the institutional stage for the

56. Jacobs, "Ye Have My Promise," 38, Zurich Mission Reports, 20 March 1960, and 13 April 1960.

57. Bule, "Pioneers in Italy," 9–10.

reopening of Italy to missionary work in 1965.⁵⁸

This development is rooted in the difficult years of World War II. A few Mormons had actually fought in Italy during World War I, however, it was only during World War II, when 100,000 Mormon men and women served in the US military (as well as smaller numbers in Allied and Axis forces), that numbers reached critical mass.⁵⁹ While the precise number of Latter-day Saint personnel in Italy is unknown, estimates in 1944 ranged from 400 to 650, and these numbers were “probably far short of the total.” This number included a few Mormon women in Italy with the Red Cross, the USO, and the Women’s Auxiliary Corps.⁶⁰

A group of five LDS chaplains—Eldin Ricks, Timothy



Left: President and Sister Erekson, Luigi Pittini, Snaideros, Roma Bortotto. Courtesy of Roma Bortotto.

58. Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 565–67; Whittaker, “Mormon Missiology,” 464; Allen, “On Becoming a Universal Church,” 19–21; Moss et al., *The International Church*, 81–82; Joseph F. Boone, “Military,” in *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, 750–51. On the impact of servicemen on the spread of Mormonism, see Joseph F. Boone, “Roles of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Relation to the United States Military, 1900–1975” (PhD diss., Brigham Young University, 1975), 1:493–529.

59. Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 540; John Thomas, “World War II,” in *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, 1369; Cowan, *The Church in the Twentieth Century*, 192.

60. Cooley and Ricks to First Presidency, 19 March 1944, MS 17124, Church History Library; “With L.D.S. Servicemen in Italy,” *Deseret News*, 24 June 1944, 10; O. E. Aylett to Harold B. Lee, 19 August 1944, MS 17124, Church History Library; Eldin Ricks Papers 1942–1952, 2 January 1944 and 18 January 1944, MS 17254, Church History Library.

Irons, Robert Gibbons, Vernon A. Cooley and Robert Braithwaite—oversaw this large and scattered group. In comparison to other theaters, Italy was better organized because of the efforts of the Mormon chaplains. Cooley reported in late 1944 that the church was “thriving” in Italy: there were approximately ten Mormon groups “scattered all over the Italian peninsula as well as the islands surrounding it.”⁶¹ Church groups were organized in Florence, Livorno, Palermo, Naples, Manduria (Puglia), Bari, Foggia, Rome, Sardinia, and Corsica. The group in Rome was the largest, with regular attendance of thirty-five to forty people each week.⁶² On Sardinia, Mormon airmen traded their cigarette and beer rations for labor and materials and built a small brick chapel (about 12’ x 20’), which was probably the first on Italian soil (other similar structures were reportedly constructed around the same time).⁶³ Theater-wide conferences were held in late December 1944 and April 1945, with 126 and 233 respectively in attendance.⁶⁴

Mormon soldiers in Italy did “considerable missionary work in their spare time under conditions of war”; however, their efforts were entirely with fellow service members.⁶⁵ Informal mission-

61. LDS Headquarters Italy Newsletter, 1 November 1944, MS 17124, Church History Library; Vernon Cooley to Mike Valenzuela, 19 October 1944, MS 17124, Church History Library; Vernon Cooley to E. W. Ellis, 30 October 1944, MS 17124, Church History Library; Richard T. Mayer, “For God and Country: Mormon Chaplains during World War II” (master’s thesis, Brigham Young University, 1975), 69, 76; Richard Maher, *For God and Country* (Bountiful, UT: Horizon, 1976), 116.

62. LDS Headquarters Italy Newsletter, 7 December 1944; 26 October, MS 17124, Church History Library; “With L.D.S. Servicemen in Italy,” 10; “Servicemen Continue Meeting in Italy,” *Deseret News*, 4 May 1946, 9; “Mormons in Airforce Hold Services in Italy,” *Deseret News*, 4 March 1944, 10.

63. Eldin Ricks to Bro. and Sis. Sessions, 10 June 1944, MS 17124, Church History Library; Robert C. Freeman and Dennis A. Wright, *Saints at War: Experiences of Latter-day Saints in World War II* (American Fork, UT: Covenant Communications, 2001), 94–96. Also, Salvatore Velluto, “The First LDS Chapel in Italy,” www.bellasion.org.

64. Cooley, Vernon Andrew, Correspondence, 1943–45, 7 December 1944, MS 17124, vol. 1, Church History Library; Harold B. Lee, *Decisions for Successful Living* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1973), 206; “L.D.S. Servicemen Hold Conference in Italy,” *Deseret News*, 30 June 1945, 8.

65. O. E. Aylett to Harold B. Lee, 19 August 1944, MS 17124, Church History Library; see report in “Conference Held in Italy,” *Deseret News*, 6 January 1945, 1, 5.



This structure in Decimomannu, Sardinia, built by LDS servicemen during World War II, was the first constructed Mormon chapel in Italy. Courtesy of Eldin Ricks family and Robert C. Freeman.

ary work did take place among locals on occasion; one soldier reported, “as I learned a little about the language, I started to visit with the people. To my surprise I found that a lot of them . . . were eager to learn about my religion. My Italian was never very good, so I couldn’t say all the things I wanted to, and many times I wished for a Book of Mormon, a tract or a pamphlet—written in Italian—to give them.”⁶⁶ These soldiers also were involved in humanitarian activities: during the Christmas of 1944, one LDS group delivered stockings that they had filled with candy, gum, soap, and toys from their rations and packages from home to children in a tuberculosis hospital.⁶⁷

These Latter-day Saint military groups were by nature transitory, and following the end of the war in 1945, the subsequent

66. “All Humble Prayers,” *Deseret News*, 19 August 1995, 16.

67. F. L. Jackson, “L.D.S. Soldiers Play Santa to Italian Children,” *Deseret News*, 27 January 1945, 7, 16.

demobilization of Allied forces in Italy in 1946–47 saw the departure of hundreds of thousands of military men and women, including the majority of Mormon military personnel. By early 1946, only three LDS military groups remained in Italy—Naples, Livorno, and Trieste. In Livorno the group’s meetings and activities for a time included several LDS German prisoners of war, including two former missionaries.⁶⁸ During this period, two LDS chaplains were granted personal audiences with Pope Pius XII through the offices of the LDS secretary of the US special envoy to the Vatican, and one of them presented the Roman pontiff with a copy of the Book of Mormon.⁶⁹

The postwar demobilization proved only temporary, as Cold War tensions led to the creation of NATO in 1949. With this came a significant expansion of the US presence and the creation of new bases throughout Western Europe. Italy, because of its strategic and political significance, became “the linchpin of the US military presence in the Mediterranean.”⁷⁰ A series of treaties in the early 1950s established a number of US military bases throughout the peninsula, including Naples, which was the southern headquarters of NATO, and the Italian airfield at Aviano in northeastern Italy, which was transferred to the US Air Force in 1955. US military numbers grew rapidly in the next years: In 1956 the US Army presence was increased by 2,500 soldiers, and by 1958 there were 2,549 army families throughout Italy. In response to continued growth, almost 400 additional housing units were begun in 1959 at Camp Ederle in Vicenza, and in 1960 two more US facilities were completed—San Vito dei Normanni Air Base, outside Brindisi, and the US Naval Air Facility at Sigonella, Sicily.⁷¹

68. “Servicemen Continue Meeting in Italy,” 9; “Servicemen Hold Conference in Leghorn, Italy,” *Deseret News*, 17 August 1946, 9.

69. Royden C. Braithwaite Papers, MS 17094, Church History Library; *L’Osservatore Romano*, 17 January 1946, 1; Freeman and Wright, *Saints at War*, 94; Maher, *For God and Country*, 127–30; Richard O. Cowan, “From the Battlefield to the Vatican to the Classroom: The Story of Eldin Ricks,” *BYU Religious Education Review*, Fall 2008, 8–11.

70. Simon Duke, *United States Military Forces and Installations in Europe* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), 195–97; Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 148.

71. “Annual Historical Report, US Army Europe (U), 1 July 1954–30 June 1955,” Historical Division Headquarters, 1956, 71; “Annual Historical Report, US Army

With the increased US military presence in Italy came growing numbers of Mormon troops and their families. The first LDS Servicemen's groups in Europe were organized in 1951, but there is only sporadic evidence of Mormons in Italy in these early years. In 1954, there were a few servicemen in Italy and Trieste, and in the same year, Charles Bartanen was made coordinator of the LDS servicemen's groups in Austria and Italy.⁷² In late 1956, the first formal LDS servicemen's groups in Italy were organized: In Vicenza, an initial group of three grew to twelve by the end of the year, and within two years sisters from Vicenza and nearby Verona were holding regular Relief Society meetings. By July 1960, a joint conference of the Aviano and Vicenza groups drew forty members. Another LDS group was located at the naval facilities in Naples: a 1958 photograph shows a group of twenty-five men, women, and children.⁷³

Despite this growth, church membership in Italy was small, lacked a clear organizational structure, and had irregular contact with central church leadership. All European servicemen's groups were under the jurisdiction of the West German Mission throughout the 1950s, and Italy does not appear to have received the same attention as the large military bases in Germany. The transfer of Italy to the jurisdiction of the Swiss Mission in 1960 had a transformative effect. For example, while servicemen's groups in West Germany and North Africa were organized under regional area

Europe (U), 1 July 1956–30 June 1957," Historical Division Headquarters, 1958, 147, 176; "Annual History, US Army Europe (U), 1 July 1958–30 June 1959," Historical Division Headquarters, 105; "Annual Historical Report, US Army Europe (U), 1 July 1957–30 June 1958," Historical Division Headquarters, 67 n. 64; *The Praetorian*, 24 October 1975, www.sicily.navy.mil/history.htm; Harry R. Fletcher, *Air Force Bases: Air Bases Outside the United States of America*, vol. 2 (Washington, DC: Center for Air Force History, 1993), xiii–xiv, 11, 155.

72. "19 Groups Organized in W. German Mission," *Deseret News*, 28 November 1951, 5; "700 LDS Soldiers Attend Conference," *Deseret News*, 3 April 1954, 6; West German Mission, Manuscript History, 7 March 1954; Zurich Mission Reports, History of the Mission for the Three Months Ending 30 September 1954, Part III.

73. "New LDS Servicemen's Groups Organized at Vicenza, Italy," *Deseret News*, 1 December 1956, 7; Quarterly SM Report, West German Mission, Manuscript History, 31 December 1956; Vicenza Servicemen's Group, General Minutes, LR 9763-11, Church History Library; Vicenza Verona Branch, Relief Society Minutes and Records, LR 12964-14, Church History Library; "Servicemen Welcomed in Vicenza Branch," *Deseret News*, 24 May 1958, 17; "Miss USA Gets Tour of Naples," *Deseret News*, 11 January 1958, 7.

coordinators in the early 1950s, it was not until late 1960 that Air Force Sergeant Robert J. Garvin was called as the first Italian area coordinator.⁷⁴

In 1962, Garvin was replaced by John Duns, an American civilian working for Lockheed Aircraft in Turin. Duns visited units throughout Italy, organized quarterly conferences, and in general tried “to raise the spirits of the saints,” who often felt like they were “the forgotten members of the Church.” Duns also looked to the future and worked “to prepare the people for that day when the door will be open and the work will go forth.”⁷⁵ With this increased oversight, the groups in Italy experienced significant growth. By late 1962, there were eleven units of varying levels of activity: the largest were in Vicenza and Naples, with 60 and 48 members respectively; most of the remaining groups comprised from 1 to 10 members. By the end of 1963, membership grew from 198 to 238, which included “31 Melchizedek Priesthood, 32 Aaronic Priesthood, 55 LDS Women.”⁷⁶

In general, the servicemen’s branches and groups were isolated from the surrounding Italian population. Still, contacts were made, and as Duns anticipated, they played a role in helping establish the church in Italy. Many service people and their families lived off-base, and all US military installations hired significant numbers of local men and women.⁷⁷ This created opportunities for church members to interact with and occasionally do mission-

74. Detailed Report on North African Area, West German Mission, Manuscript History, 8 November 1958; History Report Servicemen’s Program, West German Mission, Manuscript History, 30 September 1958; European Mission LDS Servicemen Program, 1961, Local Unit LDS Servicemen’s Handbooks, 1958–1970, CR 33–14, 3, 14, Church History Library; West German Mission, Manuscript History, 29 January 1960; Zurich Mission Reports, 15 April 1960, vol. 13; “Vicenza Servicemen’s Group, General Minutes,” LR 9763-11, Church History Library; European Mission, Servicemen’s Leadership Directories April 1960–November 1961, CR 271-44, Church History Library.

75. Zurich Mission Reports, 25 July 1962, vol. 13; Cottrell, “A History of the Discontinued Mediterranean Missions,” 96.

76. Cottrell, “History of the Discontinued Mediterranean Missions,” 96; Zurich Mission Reports, 13 September 1963, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 7–8 December 1963, vol. 13.

77. “Annual History United States Army, Europe (U), 1 July 1958–30 June 1959,” Historical Division Headquarters, 155; “Annual Historical Report US Army, Europe (U), 1 July 1957–30 June 1958,” Historical Division Headquarters, 293–94.

ary work among Italian neighbors and coworkers. Church leaders told service members they were “laying the groundwork of missionary work” and encouraged them to befriend Italians: “Let the people know who you are and what you are and your beliefs. Try to learn the language and take part in local celebrations.”⁷⁸

Servicemen’s groups also provided local contact and support for the small numbers of emigrant members. For example, the group leader at an airbase near Brindisi visited a member who had converted in Germany and then returned to Italy to marry. The family lived in desperate economic conditions and “definitely [could] use any help the Church can offer him in the way of clothing and food; his diet being marginal even at Italian standards.” The group leader’s wife even made clothing for the impoverished member’s wife.⁷⁹ In the north, the Aviano service group regularly met with the Snaidero/Pittini group, and Italian members occasionally attended and participated with servicemen’s groups. Although language often proved a barrier, North American members “felt deeply their responsibility to instruct and fellowship Italians who were eventually converted,” and as recommended by the Swiss Mission president, “some of them even learned to speak Italian.”⁸⁰ In addition, by late 1964, “as an aid to the forthcoming missionary effort,” all the servicemen’s branches and groups established “programs to teach the Articles of Faith and other fundamental items to all American members in the Italian language.”⁸¹

In the final analysis, the presence of servicemen’s groups played a decisive role in the reopening of Italy to missionary work. The presence of Mormons in Italy led to increased connections between church leaders in northern Europe and the peninsula. It also created an existing church structure on which the missionary

78. Duns, Oral History, 19–20.

79. Kenneth Hanka to Swiss Mission, Italy Servicemen File, 1962–1965, 27 May 1964, LR 8884-44, Church History Library; Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files, LR 8884-24, Church History Library.

80. Allen, “On Becoming a Universal Church,” 19, 21; Zurich Mission Reports, 21 April 1963, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 3–4 August 1963, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 1 May [1965], vol. 13; Vicenza Servicemen’s Group, Manuscript History and Historical Reports, Quarterly Historical Report, 1 April 1964 to 30 June 1964, LR 9763-2; Paul Hamilton Kelly, *Journal*, 39.

81. Italian District, Manuscript History, December 1964.

program could be grafted when missionaries finally did return. Finally, the leadership of the servicemen's branches and district provided a core of experienced leaders who would play important roles in the first decade following the reopening of the mission. Indeed, three of the early mission presidents in Italy—John Duns, Leavitt Christensen, and Clinton Gillespie—all served as leaders in US servicemen's branches in Italy.⁸²

The Buildup to Reopening

The presence of a few native Italian members and a handful of small groups of Latter-day Saint service members and their families were important pieces in the buildup leading to the reopening of Italy to missionary work in early 1965. Organizational changes instituted in the postwar period also played an important role in setting the stage. In 1960, as part of the renewed international outlook of the church, the European Mission was reestablished, with headquarters in Frankfurt, under the direction of Alvin R. Dyer, an Assistant to the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.⁸³ At his call, President McKay counseled Dyer that “this is the day for the Gospel to be carried in earnest to the people of Europe,” and this notion became a recurring theme in Dyer's sermons to missionaries and members throughout Europe.⁸⁴

When the Swiss-Austrian Mission was divided in July 1960, Dyer stated that 1960 “would be the greatest proselyting year in the history of the Church,” and he “spoke of the possibility of further mission divisions not only in Europe but throughout the world to match the strides with the increasing number of full time missionaries and the stepped up program of proselyting throughout the world.”⁸⁵ During the October general conference, Dyer reported that in August 1959, all European missions combined produced 10 percent of total baptisms; by August of

82. Bule, “Pioneers in Italy,” 5.

83. Van Orden, *Building Zion*, 181.

84. European Mission Historical Reports, 18 July 1960, vol. 2, 168; European Mission Historical Reports, n.d., vol. 1, 125.

85. European Mission Historical Reports, 6 July 1960, vol. 2, 254.

1960, this number had risen to 35 percent. In 1959, there were approximately 2,500 convert baptisms in Europe, and in 1960, the missions were on target to convert 10,000. Dyer felt they had not “even scratched the surface.”⁸⁶

It seems clear that with the reorganization of the European Mission, one of the central objectives was to reestablish missionary work in Italian-speaking areas. In August 1960, the First Presidency directed Dyer and President William Erikson of the Swiss Mission to investigate initiating missionary work in Tessin (Ticino in Italian), the sole Italian-speaking canton in Switzerland, and to gather information on the possibility of sending missionaries to work in Italy.⁸⁷ Dyer and Erikson traveled to Italy in May 1961, accompanied by two sister missionaries who spoke Italian, for several days of meeting with officials “for the purpose of probing the possibilities of sending missionaries into north Italy.” In Milan, they met Osvaldo Piantini, the Rome representative of Olympic Airways, who had been asked by the Frankfurt office manager to assist the Mormons. They visited the Foreign Affairs Office of the city police to inquire about the requirements for legal entry into the country and were informed that non-Italians could receive a three-month renewable permit to enter the country if they could prove “that they were not being paid a salary,” and that they could hold meetings and do door-to-door contacting, “so long as they were not molesting the people, meaning imposing their teachings upon them.” The permits would automatically be renewed “unless complaints had been registered,” and long-term visas could also be obtained with approval from Rome. While public meetings were legally permitted, a permit from the Ministry of the Interior

86. Alvin R. Dyer, in Conference Report, October 1960, 58; European Mission Historical Reports (n.d.), vol. 2, 269. Much of this growth was illusory, the product of heavy-handed sales tactics and outright deception. See Rick Phillips, “Rethinking the International Expansion of Mormonism,” *Nova Religio* 10 (2006): 52–68; D. Michael Quinn, “I–Thou vs. I–It Conversions: The Mormon ‘Baseball Baptism’ Era,” *Sunstone* 16, no. 7 (December 1993): 30–44.

87. Alvin R. Dyer to Erikson, 16 August 1960, Switzerland, Zurich Mission, President’s Files.

in Rome was required, and according to officials at the consulate, these permits “could be difficult to obtain.”⁸⁸

During a meeting at the US consulate in Milan, Dyer and Erekson learned that Protestant churches who had successfully obtained the permits in the past had run into trouble due to “discretionary powers” which were mobilized through “Catholic influence” once their efforts began to see some success. Based on previous experiences in helping Protestant groups to gain entrance to Italy, consular officials were “for the most part . . . pessimistic” about the possibility of Mormon missionaries working in Italy.⁸⁹

Based on these visits, Dyer made a report to the First Presidency on the feasibility of reopening Italy. In it he acknowledged that “a Religious Toleration Law does exist in Italy . . . permitting freedom of worship.” He was, however, concerned about missionaries’ ability to proselytize openly: “The Constitution of Italy, however, does not permit ‘molesting’ the people at their homes to dispense of any type of propaganda. This includes religious propaganda and proselyting.” He also acknowledged that the law might be applied differently in various regions of the country: “this permission to call at the homes without molesting seems to be a local interpretation and no doubt would not be effective to other cities to the South. This probably reflects the results of many trades and other people coming into and out of Milano.” Dyer expressed concern about the unpredictability of the visa application process and the ability to do public missionary work and said that it might represent “the point at which the whole idea of preaching the gospel to the Italians in Italy by referral or any other method would collapse.”⁹⁰

Despite these concerns, Dyer recommended that the church engage an Italian lawyer and contact the American embassy in Rome to learn about the experiences of other churches before finally meeting with the Minister of the Interior regarding obtain-

88. European Mission Historical Reports, 15 May 1961, vol. 3, 511–15; William Erekson, Interview, OH 403, Church History Library.

89. European Mission Historical Reports, 15 May 1961, vol. 3, 511–15; “Missionaries Seek Converts in Italy,” *Deseret News*, 22 July 1961, 7.

90. European Mission Historical Reports, 15 May 1961, vol. 3, 511–15; “Missionaries Seek Converts in Italy,” 7; William Erekson, Interview, 16.

ing a permit to hold public meetings. He also recommended that missionary work be commenced right away among the Italian-speaking Swiss.⁹¹ In response to this recommendation, in 1961, President McKay gave permission to expand into Tessin, but concluded that “the time was not ready to carry the gospel into Italy.” McKay’s caution was due in part to missionary numbers, economic issues associated with opening up new missions (the church opened or reopened twenty-two missions between 1958 and 1961), a shortage of materials in Italian, and the sensitive political environment in Europe. The general consensus, however, was that Tessin would be a logical jumping-off point for reopening the Italian Mission.⁹²

Nevertheless, it took several more years for Dyer’s recommendation to be acted upon. Work among the Swiss Italians did not begin until June 1963, when four elders were assigned to Lugano, followed the next month by four more who were sent to Locarno and Bellinzona. By August, that number was increased to twelve.⁹³ Despite this influx of missionaries, the work in Tessin met with limited success: the first baptism (of an Italian-speaking German) did not occur until January 1964. In August 1964, there were “only three investigators totally among the four teams.” The Swiss Mission president, John Russon, attributed this slowness to “social pressure.” The following month he cut the number of missionaries in half to six, and sent the other Italian-speaking missionaries to work among the pockets of Italian immigrants in other major Swiss cities. The progress of the work, he reported, was “painfully slow”: the missionaries felt isolated from the German-speaking majority of their companions, and as a result, morale was low. His conclusion: “With sixteen missionaries totally in the program, we have a tremendous investment of manpower for the meager

91. European Mission Historical Reports, 15 May 1961, vol. 3, 511–15; European Mission Historical Reports, 18 May 1961, vol. 3, 515.

92. Alvin R. Dyer to Erekson, 29 May 1961; Kirby, “History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Switzerland,” 171–76; *2005 Church Almanac*, 470–71.

93. John Russon to Theodore Burton, 6 September 1963, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files; Kirby, “History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Switzerland,” 171–76; Zurich Mission Reports, 26 June 1963, vol. 13; Russon to Ezra Taft Benson, 2 March 1964, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files.

results we appear to be obtaining. The real benefit would appear to be prospective missionaries and future leaders for the work in Italy.”⁹⁴

During the years that Italy was under the Swiss Mission, the mission presidents traveled with increasing frequency to Italy to meet with the servicemen’s units, with the few Italian members, and to do the background work that would lead to the reopening of Italy to missionary work. During this time, there were occasional conversions among native Italians. In early May 1963, for example, when President Russon was traveling in Italy, he baptized a Sister Lucci in the sea. She was converted through the efforts of her daughter, who joined in Zollikofen, Switzerland.⁹⁵

Gastarbeiter

At the same time that the first missionaries were being dispatched to Tessin, another program was being developed in several German-speaking missions to work with the many Italian migrant workers in central Europe, the so-called *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers). In the 1950s and early 1960s, Italy experienced an “economic miracle” in which it was transformed from an effectively underdeveloped country to one of the top ten industrialized nations. During these years per capita GDP rose at a rate of 5–5.5 percent annually.⁹⁶ Despite this massive economic expansion at home, this was still an age of mass emigration as large numbers of Italians left the country in search of work. While the Americas and Australia continued to be popular destinations, after 1955 Italian emigration “was essentially European.” Some went to France and Switzerland, but the primary destination was Germany, which had much higher economic growth rates than Italy, and a concurrent

94. Russon to Ezra Taft Benson, 2 March 1964; Zurich Mission Reports, 13 August 1964, vol. 13; Russon to Ezra Taft Benson, 3 September 1964, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files.

95. “Swiss Mission Reaper,” 4 May 1963, cited in Ray McCune, “Swiss Mission and Italy,” LDS Gems.

96. Jon Cohen and Giovanni Federico, *The Growth of the Italian Economy, 1820–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 10; Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 212–16.

need for large quantities of unskilled labor. To meet this need, in 1955 Germany signed a labor recruitment agreement with Italy and began actively seeking workers. Between 1957 and 1965, over one million Italians went to work in Germany. In 1963, for example, of 800,000 foreign workers in West Germany, 297,000 were Italian. The workers fit into a fairly homogenous demographic: they were young, male, 70 percent were married, though only half were accompanied by their wives. Most were migrant laborers who did not settle permanently, but worked for stretches of up to ten months, only returning home for holidays. These workers were commonly perceived as unhygienic and unhealthy Communists and criminals. In Switzerland, a park sign announced, “No entry for dogs and Italians.”⁹⁷

In early 1963, President Blythe Gardner of the South German Mission was struck by the number of Italian workers in his mission, and directed one of his missionaries, Marcellus Snow (a descendant of Lorenzo Snow), to study the possibility of working with this untapped source of potential converts.⁹⁸ For several months, Snow and two other missionaries studied Italian and worked with the *Gastarbeiter*. A *Church News* report gives a sense of the program’s immediate success: “Within a week active proselyting began in the form of street surveying. A week later twenty-minute discussions were presented to contacts as an orientation to the message and doctrines of the church. Within a month group meetings were initiated, which quickly increased in effectiveness and attendance. By early June, groups of twenty and more investigators were presented Gospel discussions in Italian at semi-weekly group meetings.” Based on the positive results of this test, Gardner organized a missionary district in Stuttgart with six missionaries to work solely with Italians. The first convert

97. Ginsborg, *A History of Contemporary Italy*, 227–29; Sassoon, *Contemporary Italy*, 103; John O’Loughlin, “Distribution and Migration of Foreigners in German Cities,” *Geographical Review* 70 (1980): 255–56; Yvonne Rieker, “Südländer, Ostagenten oder Westeuropäer? Die Politik der Bundesregierung und das Bild der italienischen Gastarbeiter 1955–1970,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 40 (2000): 236–43.

98. “Progress Report of South German Italian District,” South German Mission, Presidents’ Correspondence, 13 April 1963.

was baptized in July, and many others were being taught by the missionaries. By August, Gardner expanded work to Esslingen, Ludwigsburg, and Feuerbach, with a total of twenty missionaries serving full-time in the Italian program. The investment paid off as nine converts were added during the third quarter. Over the next year, the Italian districts were among the most statistically successful in the entire mission. Forty Italians were baptized, all men, most between the ages of twenty-one and thirty, and most from southern Italy. Gardner received encouragement to continue the program from President McKay and Ezra Taft Benson, who felt that this could mark the formal start of missionary work in Italy, after almost 100 years.

Based on the success in the South German Mission, similar Italian programs were established in the Swiss and North German missions. In the latter a district of elders was assigned to study Italian in order to teach the some 5,000 Italians employed at the Volkswagen factory near Braunschweig.⁹⁹ The Bavarian mission also began an Italian program to work with Italian construction workers in Munich in late 1964, and there was discussion about implementing the program in France as well.¹⁰⁰

Working with *Gastarbeiter* presented certain challenges. Many of the Italian workers lived in barracks on the grounds of the factories that employed them, and vigilant German gatekeepers made contacting potential converts very difficult, indeed some companies “were especially uncooperative to missionaries and allowed virtually no admittance.”¹⁰¹ When possible, missionaries taught investigators in their company-provided living quarters,

99. Gilbert W. Scharffs, *Mormonism in Germany* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1970), 195.

100. Bruno Vassel, Interview by James Toronto, 27 July 2006, Salt Lake City, notes in author's possession; Theodore Burton to John Russon, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President's Files.

101. On this, see Anne von Oswald and Barbara Sonnenburger, “Bullenkloster’: Leben in ‘Gastarbeiter’-Unterkünften in den Sechziger und Siebziger Jahren,” *Sozialwissenschaftliche Informationen* 29, no. 3 (2000): 200–7; “Quarterly Historical Reports for the South German Mission,” Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, vol. 2, June 1963–September 1964; European Mission Historical Reports, 4 July 1964.

though their activities attracted the objections of local priests.¹⁰² Innovative proselytizing techniques were developed to contact the numerous, but often isolated or disbursed population of Italian workers. Missionaries often went to the local train station, where Italians tended to congregate, and inquired “*Lei parla italiano?*”; at Christmas, elders in Stuttgart passed out Articles of Faith cards in the train station to workers leaving for Italy on special direct trains.¹⁰³ Missionaries also organized a variety of activities, including parties, cultural events, and Christmas caroling, for Italian members and investigators. In December 1963, for example, a Christmas party was held in the Esslingen Ward house with the local German LDS bishop in attendance.¹⁰⁴

Another challenge was learning a new language, which missionaries in the Italian program had to teach themselves.¹⁰⁵ In November 1963, the South German Mission began publishing *Il Rowanello*, a weekly mission newsletter with news and grammar lessons directed entirely to missionaries working with Italians.¹⁰⁶ There was great optimism about the missionaries’ ability to learn the language in a short period of time. Elders in the South German Italian program “all committed to be effective missionaries in the Italian language in thirty to sixty days,” and President Gardner claimed that those “who a few weeks ago did not dream that they would be called to labor among the Italians, are today speaking Italian fluently.”¹⁰⁷

While learning Italian and memorizing the missionary lessons in a new language was daunting, there was much enthusiasm for the program among missionaries. The Swiss and German Missions were notoriously difficult fields of labor: missionaries often

102. Scharffs, *Mormonism in Germany*, 195.

103. Vassel, Interview; Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, 11 December 1963.

104. Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, 16 November 1963; Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, 14 December 1963; Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, 11 January 1964.

105. “Quarterly Historical Reports for the South German Mission,” Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, vol. 2, June 1963–September 1964.

106. Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, 13 November 1963.

107. Blythe M. Gardner, South German Mission, Presidents’ Correspondence, 19 September 1963.

worked for weeks on end without teaching a single lesson, and many missionaries returned home after two years without any conversions. In contrast, the Italians were more receptive: missionaries taught regularly and often to groups of ten to twenty workers at a time. Indeed, the Italian program enjoyed such success that some German missionaries became envious of the Italian missionaries.¹⁰⁸ One South German missionary contrasted working with Italians and Germans: “I really like the Italians. They are so cool. A completely different people from the Germans.” Even before he knew the language, he was stopping Italians on the street and “herd[ing] them into the local church where Elders who knew Italian taught them. His assessment: “I could have never done it with the Germans.” Within a short time of starting work with the Italian district, and after teaching many lessons and with a baptism already scheduled, he wrote in his journal, “I hope I never have to go back to teaching Germans.”¹⁰⁹ A mission leader similarly reported that “these young Italian men [are] about five times as receptive as the average Germans.”¹¹⁰ This enthusiasm was tempered somewhat by the challenges of working with mostly migrant, male workers. One missionary observed, “Now that I have been in the Italian Program a while I think that some of the Italians are just not smart enough to be taught. It is very hard to hold their attention during a meeting. Making an appointment means little to them, they are either there or they are not.”¹¹¹

Initially, Italian converts attended German branches. In August 1963, Elder Marcellus Snow reported that the first Italian convert, a Brother Leone, gave a talk in a German ward and was followed by a German stake leader, who spoke “on the importance of love and understanding of all peoples. He urged the members to start learning Italian and to treat the Italians as brothers. After

108. Bruno Vassel, “Mission Journal,” 12 January 1965, Church History Library; Vassel, Interview.

109. Stephen Stewart Papers 1963–1965, 8–15 May 1964, MS 18702, 143–45, Church History Library.

110. Gardner to Henry D. Moyle, 3 September 1963, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files.

111. Vassel, “Mission Journal,” 17 February 1965.

the meeting, he invited Brother Leone and three of his friends out to dinner. The members lingered nearly 30 minutes after the meeting and spoke with the three Italian guests (2 of them members). I have never felt such a genuinely charitable spirit among the members before.”¹¹²

As convert numbers began to increase, separate Italian branches were organized to receive the new members, and in Esslingen at least, the Italian branch was located in its own building. Interaction between German and Italian Saints seems to have been only sporadic, usually in the form of visits by local German leaders.¹¹³ German Saints did on occasion attempt to assist their Italian brethren: In late 1963, German LDS youth in Stuttgart held a clothing and toy drive to benefit Italian members preparing to return home for the holiday season.¹¹⁴

The Italian zones experienced some success, but they also confronted the challenges of dealing with an itinerant, predominantly young male population. It was difficult to teach full families, and often the men would return home to Italy, where a combination of a lack of church support and family pressure often led to backsliding and inactivity. While many disappeared when they left Germany, there were several cases in which Italian converts in Germany played an important role in the early growth of the church in Italy. One such case is that of Leopoldo Larcher, whose brother, Antonio, was baptized in Germany. The family’s reaction was less than supportive; they thought “he was completely crazy and always a bit strange anyway.” Antonio arranged with Ezra Taft Benson to have Italian-speaking missionaries working in Germany sent to teach his family in Italy, and in August 1964, six months before missionaries officially entered Italy, Leopoldo and his wife Maria were baptized in the Adriatic Sea near Rimini: they donned their swimming suits, while the missionaries wore

112. Marcellus Snow to Blythe Gardner, South German Mission, Presidents’ Correspondence, 18 August 1963.

113. “Quarterly Historical Reports for the South German Mission,” Germany Munich Mission, vol. 2, June 1963–Sept 1964.

114. Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, 27 November 1963.

blue jeans.¹¹⁵ In September 1965, Leopoldo became the first Italian branch president, and later he was the first native Italian mission president.¹¹⁶ Another *Gastarbeiter* convert, Leone Michelini, became acquainted with Mormonism in Munich in 1964 when missionaries accidentally knocked on his door while looking for someone else. He was eventually baptized, and upon his return to Turin, his wife and two children also converted. His son, Hermes, was one of the first native Italian missionaries called to serve following the reopening of Italy to missionary work.¹¹⁷

Eventually, the enthusiasm that accompanied the success of the various Italian programs led to renewed discussions about opening Italy to missionary work. In September 1963, Swiss Mission president John Russon corresponded with Theodore Burton, president of the European Mission, regarding the possibility of working in Italy. While Burton was pleased by the success of the new program, he was cautious about going into Italy. Burton told Russon that President McKay himself “gave his approval to continue to work in Switzerland and in Germany, but did not give me approval to go into Italy. Before we do so, it will be necessary to get the First Presidency’s permission for this activity.”¹¹⁸

In July 1964, an Italian conference was held in Stuttgart, evidence of the rapid success that the program had achieved. Speaking to a chapel filled with Italian members and investigators from Germany and Switzerland, Elder Ezra Taft Benson described the gathering as “an historical meeting” and suggested “this may be the beginning of teaching the gospel to the people of Italy.”¹¹⁹

115. Maraly Ledezma, “The Larcher Family: Constant Faith and Devotion since the Beginning of the History of the LDS Church in Italy,” www.bellasion.org.

116. Leopoldo Larcher, Interview, 3 October 1996, Milan, Italy; Bule, “Pioneers in Italy,” 6.

117. *La Stella* 2, April 1968, 83.

118. Burton to Russon, 14 September 1963, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files.

119. “Quarterly Historical Report for the South German Mission,” Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, July–September 1964, 4 July 1964; Minutes of the Italian Conference, South German Mission, Presidents’ Correspondence, 4 July 1964; Bule, “Pioneers in Italy,” 6.

Producing Materials

In response to the expanding work with Italian *Gastarbeiter* and the ongoing discussions about opening Italy to missionary work, these years also saw the translation of a number of key church publications. The most important of these was the retranslation of the Book of Mormon. Discussion of a possible new translation began as early as 1951 in the French Mission, which at the time was responsible for church affairs in Italy. In response to the occasional request for an Italian copy of the Book of Mormon, the mission sent copies of the original 1852 translation. The feedback, according to mission president Golden Woolf, was “quite derogatory and critical.” He asked Fabio Cagli, who was quite expert with English, for his assessment. Cagli found the original translation “altogether medioeval”: The language was archaic, and the text full of “numerous mistakes.” His final analysis: “the Snow translation has grown old; it smells dusty, as all things which have been set aside for too long a time.” Rather than try to fix the translation, he found it easier to start from scratch, and made an initial attempt at translating some of 1 Nephi. Based on this, Woolf recommended, and the First Presidency concurred, that Cagli be retained to make a new translation of the Book of Mormon.¹²⁰

Cagli labored on the translation for over a decade, but the project was delayed due to his growing disaffection with the church, perhaps as a result of a misunderstanding with President Woolf over his unauthorized performance of several priesthood ordinances. He became disruptive in church meetings, indeed at one point he was “bodily carried out,” and eventually he and his wife were excommunicated for apostasy.¹²¹ After several years away from the church, in 1960, Cagli expressed a desire to be

120. Golden Woolf to First Presidency, French Mission, Presidents’ Files, 13 August 1951; Fabio Cagli to Brother Christensen, French Mission, Presidents’ Files, 25 July 1951; First Presidency to Golden L. Woolf, French Mission, Presidents’ Files, 20 September 1951; Council Meeting of Mission Presidency, French Mission, Presidents’ Files, 30 October 1951.

121. Golden Woolf to First Presidency, ca. July 1960, European Mission Historical Reports, 188–89; French Mission, Presidents’ Files, 27 December 1951; Erekson, Interview, OH 403, 16.

reconciled and to resume the translation. European Mission president Alvin Dyer met with him and his wife, and though there was some concern about his stability, as well as his motives in seeking out the church (he was reportedly in financial trouble and was “working on a farm to help support his family”), in the end he was given permission to resume the translation.¹²² Cagli completed the translations of both the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants by mid-1961, and finished the Pearl of Great Price the following year, even though his wife divorced him and he was hospitalized several times for schizophrenia.¹²³ Despite these trials, he was recommended to translate several other works, including *The Articles of Faith* by James Talmage and *Essentials in Church History* by Joseph Fielding Smith.¹²⁴ Though the Book of Mormon was ready by 1961, production delays pushed back its actual publication until 1964, when a run of 10,000 copies was printed. The Doctrine and Covenants and Pearl of Great Price were published the following year.¹²⁵

In addition to the principal religious texts, in the summer of 1960 Roma Bortotto was assigned to translate several missionary tracts into Italian. Four pamphlets were completed that year, with two others in process.¹²⁶ When the South German Italian program was established in 1963, the demand for Italian material grew considerably. A report noted that with the increasing number of members in the Italian branch, the missionaries were “more and more in need of literature in Italian. All we have now of real value are the Bible and the Joseph Smith tract.” Copies of the Book of Mormon in Italian were “few and far between and

122. European Mission Historical Reports, ca. July 1960, 188–89.

123. Zurich Mission Reports, 26 August 1961, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 16 August 1961, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 9 June 1961, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 7 April 1962, vol. 13; Cagli, Fabio, Affidavit, 1961, MS 140, Church History Library.

124. Zurich Mission Reports, 25 June 1962, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 7 July 1962, vol. 13.

125. Excerpts from “A Tribute to President David O. McKay,” Zurich Mission Reports, vol. 13; Zurich Mission Reports, 5 April 1963, vol. 13; Photo Stuttgart, European Mission Historical Reports, 30 March 1964.

126. European Mission Historical Reports, ca. 30 August 1960, 224; European Mission Historical Reports 1960–65, n.d. (ca. 31 December 1960), 374.



Photo of Italian converts at a conference in Germany, early 1960s. Courtesy of LDS Church News.

can no longer be used on a wide scale to help teach investigators.¹²⁷ In response to this situation, the missionaries improvised: Unofficial translations were prepared by elders, assisted by some of their first converts. In 1963, missionaries in the South German mission translated, printed, and bound Italian hymnbooks with about thirty hymns, and the following month a proselytizing tape was translated for them by an Italian contact. Several missionary teaching tools were translated by a professional agency, but the bulk of the lessons and several pamphlets were translated by the missionaries and their Italian converts themselves.¹²⁸

The Home Stretch

All of these postwar developments came to a head in 1964, and finally resulted in the resumption of missionary work in Italy in early 1965. A key figure in this final stage was the apostle and future church president Ezra Taft Benson, who one scholar declared was “the individual who had the single most powerful

127. Marcellus Snow to Blythe Gardner, South German Mission, President’s Correspondence, 15 September 1963.

128. “Quarterly Historical Reports for the South German Mission,” Germany Munich Mission, Manuscript History, October–December 1963; “Progress Report of South German Mission Italian District,” South German Mission Presidents’ Correspondence, 13 April 1963; “Second Progress Report of South German Mission Italian District,” South German Mission Presidents’ Correspondence, 19 May 1963; Snow, “Missionary Work Among Italians in Germany.”

impact on establishing the Church in Italy.¹²⁹ Benson had a long history in Europe, and a particular interest in Italy, dating back to his mission in Britain and his tenure as European Mission president in the immediate aftermath of World War II.¹³⁰ In 1952, Benson became Dwight D. Eisenhower's secretary of agriculture: In this capacity he traveled to forty-three countries and developed an extensive network of connections as well as an international reputation.¹³¹ As secretary of agriculture, Benson visited Italy several times, including in 1957, when he received the prestigious High Cross of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic in recognition of his work to resolve Italy's serious postwar food shortages.¹³² At the dedication of the Swiss Temple in 1955, he remarked on meeting "the leaders of the Italian nation—the Prime Minister, the President, and members of the Cabinet," and his desire "to bring them the gospel message that their nation might be lifted up as only the gospel can lift a nation and its people!"¹³³ He reiterated these sentiments several years later in general conference.¹³⁴

In late 1963, Benson was again called to preside over the European Mission. It was clear that as soon as he took up his new position, one of his objectives was reopening Italy to missionary work. Immediately after his arrival in Europe, he began discussions with the mission presidents and missionaries working with Italians. He wrote President Russon in late January, "I want to work closely with you on this in the hope that we can make substantial progress."¹³⁵ He followed carefully the work of the German and Swiss Missions' Italian programs and had several detailed reports sent directly to him by the missionaries working with Italians. In a lengthy letter dated 29 January 1964, Elder Mar-

129. Bule, "Pioneers in Italy," 5–6.

130. Allen and Leonard, *The Story of the Latter-day Saints*, 543.

131. William G. Hartley, "Ezra Taft Benson," in *The Presidents of the Church*, ed. Leonard J. Arrington (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1986), 443; Reed A. Benson and Sheri L. Dew, "Ezra Taft Benson," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*, 1:102–3.

132. Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 208–10, 216, 219.

133. Ezra Taft Benson, *So Shall Ye Reap* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1960), 78–79.

134. Ezra Taft Benson, in Conference Report, April 1958, 58–61.

135. Ezra Taft Benson to John Russon, 27 January 1964, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President's Files.



Before and after the reopening of the Italian Mission in 1965, Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles visited Italy numerous times to meet with Italian and US government officials. This photo shows, left to right, an aide to Dr. Alessandro Varino (referred to in the mission history as minister of Religious Affairs), Minister Varino, Elder and Sister Benson, and President John Duns during a meeting on 13 October 1967. Courtesy of Church History Library.

cellus Snow, the Italian program zone leader in the South German mission, provided an overview of the program since its inception in March 1963, a report on the progress of the work, and excerpts of relevant sections of the Italian constitution regarding “the legal rights of non-Catholic churches in Italy.”¹³⁶

136. Marcellus Snow to Ezra Taft Benson, 22 January 1964, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files; David E. Castle to Ezra Taft Benson, South German Mission, Presidents’ Correspondence, 10 July 1964.

Benson was not reluctant to use his political connections and stature to lay the groundwork for reopening Italy. Through the assistance of the Italian minister of agriculture, a meeting in November 1963 was arranged with senior government officials, and eventually the minister of religious affairs, Alessandro Varino. As one observer reported, Benson was “greeted with open arms” and was assured that the missionaries “would be welcome to proselyte in Italy.”¹³⁷

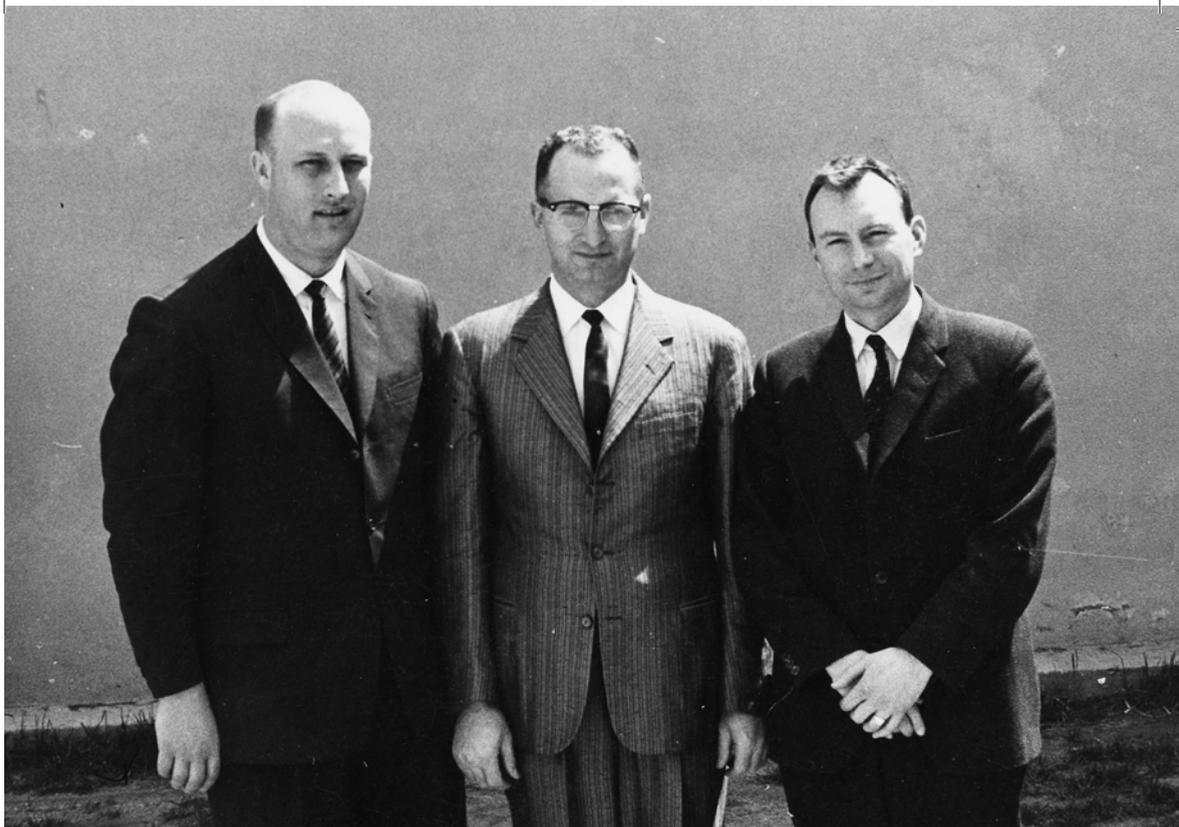
While this political dialogue was playing out, in the summer of 1964 Benson gave two missionaries in the South German Mission’s Italian program permission to go to Italy for the final three weeks of their missionary service to teach Antonio Larcher’s family. At Benson’s request, the two missionaries reported directly back to him about this first missionary foray into Italy.¹³⁸ Another important step in the buildup to the reopening was the creation of the Italian district of the Swiss Mission on 22 November 1964, which united the various servicemen’s church units throughout Italy. The new district was presided over by Leavitt Christensen, a US civil servant employed by the US Army; John H. Kitsell, a British citizen employed by NATO; and Paul H. Kelly, a lieutenant with the US Air Force.

The final decision to reopen Italy to missionary work was made during a meeting in Stuttgart on 22 February 1965. Russon, John Fetzer, president of the South German Mission, and Benson were present. The Swiss Mission history describes the meeting:

After prayerful thought and discussion Pres. Benson gave the green light to open Italy through the formation of an Italian Zone under the Swiss Mission and authorized the transfer of six missionaries from the South German Mission and two from the Bavarian Mission to the Swiss Mission. These eight with fourteen

137. Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 376–77; Hartley, “Ezra Taft Benson,” 444; Zurich Mission Reports, November [1964].

138. David E. Castle to Ezra Taft Benson, South German Mission, President’s Correspondence, 10 July 1964; John M. Russon to President Fetzer, 3 September 1964, Switzerland Zurich Mission, President’s Files; Stephen Stewart Papers 1963–1965, 12 June 1964, 151–52.



Italian District presidency, Swiss Mission, 1964, left to right: Paul Kelly, Leavitt Christensen, and John Kitsell. Courtesy of Church History Library.

from the Swiss Mission will form the new Zone. The transfers were to be effective Friday, Feb. 26. with a meeting scheduled in Zurich to orient the new arrivals and a meeting the following day Sat. Feb. 27, in Lugano to launch the program. Pres. Benson indicated that the First Presidency and Missionary Committee were reluctant to open [an] Italian Mission at this time in view of the heavy expenses of creating a new mission and proposed instead the creating of an Italian district subject to Pres. Benson's approval.¹³⁹

Almost one hundred years after the first mission to the Waldensian valleys had sputtered out, Mormon missionaries were preparing once again to take their message into Italy.

139. Zurich Mission Reports, 22 February [1965], vol. 13.