

THE “MORMON MOMENT” IN ITALY: AN *INTESA* AND A TEMPLE

Beginning in 1929, relations between Italy and the Catholic Church were governed by a “Concordat” negotiated between Benito Mussolini and the Holy See. With the birth of the Republic of Italy in 1948, a new constitution recognized the Concordat with the Roman Catholic Church (granting it favored legal and political status in Italian society) but also abolished vestiges of religious discrimination against individuals and groups.¹ These events were part of the evolution of the Italian government’s policy concerning church-state relations, which began in 1848 with the Albertine Statute’s toleration of both Waldensians and Jews, as well as the king’s recognition of their political, property, and employment rights.

1. The historical roots of the 1929 Concordat and the Catholic Church’s privileged place in Italy can be traced to the so-called “Implicit Rule” by which the state recognizes Catholic identity and continuity as a central element of Italian national unity. See Alessandro Ferrari, “Civil Religion in Italy: A ‘Mission Impossible’?,” *George Washington International Law Review* 41, no. 4 (2010): 842–45.

Since then, a number of developments have brought about a process of deregulation and liberalization in the religious arena, which has resulted in the recognition of non-Catholic religions.²

The LDS Church in Italy reaped the benefits of these reforms when it achieved two significant milestones in its growth. In 2008, President Thomas S. Monson announced that the church would build a temple in Rome. For Italian Mormons, this was a major development—the realization of a dream and the culmination of nearly fifty years of preparation and effort. A few years later, in 2012, the Latter-day Saint community reached another benchmark when Giorgio Napolitano, the president of the Republic, signed an official *intesa*, or agreement, that recognized the LDS Church as a full legal partner, eligible for every religious right guaranteed by Italian law for non-Catholic religions. This act marked a subtle but profound shift in Mormonism's national status and a historic coming-of-age moment.

Since 1984, when this legal status was made available to religious minorities, only eleven religious communities out of more than 600 in Italy have successfully run the gauntlet of government procedures required to achieve the highest possible level of legal recognition. The LDS Church confronted various challenges in its quest for the *intesa* and for construction of a temple. The factors that contributed to these achievements—dubbed the Mormons' "Italian Moment" by one journalist³—demonstrate why privileges like these are so difficult to attain for religious minorities. Such religious rights, although guaranteed by the Italian Constitution, are not freely granted and must be tenaciously pursued and won through strong organization, interfaith cooperation, and effective advocacy in the halls of power.

2. Massimo Introvigne, "Italy's Surprisingly Favorable Environment for Religious Minorities," in *New Religious Movements in the Twenty-First Century: Legal, Political, and Social Challenges in Global Perspective*, ed. Phillip Charles Lucas and Thomas Robbins (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 75; Homer, "New Religions in the Republic of Italy," 203.

3. Marco Tosatti, "Mormoni, momento Italiano," *La Stampa*.it, 18 September 2012, <http://www.lastampa.it/2012/09/18/blogs/san-pietro-e-dintorni/mormoni-momento-italiano-r1FPd9ZSjvjorKNwsMcwI/pagina.html>.

The CPB and the Ente Morale

When the Italian Mission reopened in 1965, the church decided to operate in Italy as a foreign entity under the legal auspices of the Corporation of the Presiding Bishop (CPB), headquartered in Salt Lake City. Under this arrangement, the mission president represented the church in purchasing and renting property, obtaining visas, opening bank accounts, and conducting similar financial and administrative affairs. Concerning ecclesiastical matters such as proselytizing, holding public worship services, and baptizing converts, legal challenges occasionally cropped up and were handled on an ad hoc basis.

By the mid-1970s, the church's legal requirements had changed significantly—it needed a more formal, secure, and permanent solution that did not depend on a transitory mission president.⁴ The option eventually chosen by church attorneys was based on the Treaty of Friendship signed in 1948 between Italy and the United States that permits US corporations to be treated as legal Italian entities. The application, approved and signed by the Ministry of Interior in May 1978 granted to the Corporation of the Presiding Bishop legal authorization as a foreign nonprofit corporation (*ente morale*), allowing the church to operate more easily in Italy. Among other privileges granted, ecclesiastical leaders could, for the first time, perform marriages with civil effect.⁵

The Agreement of Villa Madama

In 1984, following a period of increased secularization and political agitation (with strong leadership from the Waldensian and Jewish communities) to implement the religious freedoms guaranteed

4. Our account of church efforts to attain legal recognition in Italy is derived from a variety of sources: interviews with church legal personnel, mission leaders, church members, and Italian lawyers and legal scholars; articles in the Italian media; and reports, correspondence, and other material from mission histories and archives. To maintain confidentiality and privacy, we do not mention names of some individuals. Notes in James Toronto's possession.

5. It appears, however, that church leaders did not begin formally exercising this right until 1986. Angela Carattoni Noda, Centro Servizi, to James Toronto, Email, 19 March 2013.

in the Constitution, the Italian government renegotiated its agreement with the Roman Catholic Church. The terms of the Agreement of Villa Madama, signed on 16 February 1984, replaced the 1929 Concordat and stipulated that Roman Catholicism would retain a privileged position in Italy but no longer be recognized as the state church. The new agreement, and several that followed, removed Catholic clergy from the state payroll and provided minority religions the opportunity for full legal recognition through the signing of an *intesa* with the state.

The *intesa* process was intended to grant access to a new system of state-sponsored financial support for other non-Catholic churches and to offer religious benefits previously denied (for example, clergy visits to church members in prisons and hospitals, teaching non-Catholic curriculum in the public schools during religion class, and time off from work or school to observe religious holidays). Symbolically, and crucially for Italian adherents of minority religions, signing an *intesa* represented a badge of authenticity and legitimacy—a public affirmation that the religious community had come of age and attained an equal standing in Italy's public square. For this reason, the question of the *intesa* involved a significant psychological dimension: the achievement of this ultimate level of recognition boosted the self-esteem, image, and prestige of a religious minority, while lack of this legal imprimatur connoted that a group was substandard or cultish.

The Italian government completed the first *intesa* with a non-Catholic group, the Association of Waldensians and Methodists, in 1984. Two years later (1986), prime minister Bettino Craxi signed two more agreements with the Assemblies of God (Pentecostals) and the Adventist churches,⁶ and in February 1987 the Italian government approved a fourth, this time with the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, another of Italy's historic religious groups (along with the Waldensians).⁷

6. For more details, see Francesco Broglio, "Libertà religiosa e sistema di rapporti tra Stato e Confessioni religiose: Le 'Intese' del 1986 con le Assemblies pentecostali e con le Chiese avventiste," *Rivista di Studi Politici Internazionali* 54 (1987): 539–61.

7. "Anche in Italia sabato sacro per gli ebrei: *intesa* firmata con le Comunità israelitiche," *Il Giornale*, 28 February 1987.

However, reaching an intesa would prove to be a highly complex, politicized, and ambiguous process, underscoring the reality that full religious rights were *not* guaranteed on an equal basis. For religious minorities in Italy, the prospect of formal recognition remained an elusive goal.⁸ An Italian legal scholar views the incompatibility between constitutional principles of liberty (the opportunity for every religious group to attain equal standing through an intesa) and equality (the statutory necessity but, in actual practice, lack of common access by all religions to these liberties) as "a central problem of Italian ecclesiastical law in its present stage of development."⁹ Italian ecclesiastical law attracts criticism because public powers possess an "excessive amount of discretion in deciding whether to accept or reject" proposals for an agreement and because lack of objective criteria "facilitates abuse."¹⁰ In sum, despite constitutional guarantees of equal treatment for all religions, the intesa system openly granted privileged status to some religions over others.

Achievement of Ente Patrimoniale Status

In 1986, the Italian government decreed that laws on non-Catholic religions would apply only to Italian religious legal entities. As a result of this turn of events, church attorneys decided to pursue recognition as an Italian legal entity, *Ente Patrimoniale*. The church's unofficial application, modeled after applications submitted by the Seventh-day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses, was presented to the Interior Ministry on 18 May 1989.

8. See the analysis of related issues in "International Religious Freedom Report 2010: Italy," US Department of State, 17 November 2010, <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/irf/2010/148946.htm>.

9. Silvio Ferrari, "State and Church in Italy," in *State and Church in the European Union*, ed. Gerhard Robbers (Baden-Baden: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2005), 213.

10. Ferrari, "State and Church in Italy," 213–14. A number of scholars in Italy have examined the underlying historical, political, and social roots of this paradox in Italian law regarding religious freedom: see, for example, Carlo Panara, "In the Name of God: State and Religion in Contemporary Italy," *Religion and Human Rights* 6 (2011): 75–104; Dino Cofrancesco, "Perchè all'Italia manca una religione civile?," *Rivista di Politica* 2 (June 2011): 141–58; and Alessandro Ferrari, *La libertà religiosa in Italia: Un percorso incompiuto* (Rome: Carocci Editore, 2012).

Unexpectedly, just as discussion was getting under way and the preliminary application papers drawn up, the legal recognition effort encountered controversy and sharp opposition from the Italian government. After some initial discussions with Ministry of Interior officials, church attorneys received a strongly negative reaction to their application to create an Italian legal entity. Concerns revolved around the “Italianness” of the new foundation: Would it be truly Italian, or American, in nature? Mormons in Italy, according to what government officials had ascertained, had no say in appointing their administration, and those in charge of appointing the presiding officers resided in the United States, not Italy.

This sentiment was not limited to Mormons, however; it also applied to other US-based religious movements seeking legal status in Italy. An official from the Church of Scientology reported to Latter-day Saint officials that, after a trip to Rome to meet with the ministry’s director of religious affairs, he learned that the Italian government was deeply concerned about American religions and their influence in Italy. The director had informed the scientologist that “submissions given to him by the Mormon Church were flawed” and that “it would never receive recognition as long as there was an attempt to push American ideas and American concepts into Italy. This is a country of Italians for Italians.” In response, LDS Church officials created a new organizational structure and revised the language of their application to address the ministry’s concerns about Italian identity. The proposed constitution of the new entity stated that the governing board would consist of a president, vice president, and secretary or treasurer—all of whom would be Italian citizens domiciled in Italy—and approved by a simple majority vote of church members in Italy during annual conferences.

At first glance, the ministry’s demand seems to be a questionable expectation for American religious groups seeking government approval in Italy. This legal impediment appeared to be a violation of constitutional guarantees of equal treatment for all religions. But a closer look reveals several factors that help explain the opposition posed by ministry officials. The legal resistance

encountered by Mormons and other American religions provides an instructive case study of the "central problem" of church and state law in Italy. Governments grant excessive discretionary power to lawmakers and lower-level officials who, in the absence of objective criteria, make arbitrary policies and decisions affecting the acceptance or rejection of minority religions. Sometimes powerful individuals in the ministry with personal animus toward Mormons and other new religions created severe difficulties in the approval process. More commonly, as in the present case, officials raised objections and created bureaucratic obstacles based on the political ideology and guidelines of the government currently in power at a given time.

It is easier to make sense of the resistance to American religious inroads on the part of the Ministry of Interior when one recalls that the 1980s were a time of a "re-found sense of national identity" and Italian pride.¹¹ This was the apex of Socialist political power in Italy, with party leader Bettino Craxi serving an unusually long term of four years (1983–87) as prime minister. Craxi, in 1985, rejected US demands to extradite Arab terrorists and then sent Italian troops to confront American forces at the US naval air base in Sigonella, Sicily.¹² The next year he opposed the American bombing of Libya, and his criticism of American foreign policy and hegemony won him widespread acclaim in Italy and abroad. It was in this context that US-based churches seeking legal recognition by the Italian government during this time period encountered anti-American sentiment.

To the surprise of the LDS Church's attorneys, the legal recognition effort also sparked controversy among Italian church members and leaders who felt that the decision to seek ente status was shortsighted and potentially harmful to the church's interests in Italy. The essence of their argument was that the church should focus instead on attaining the much more advantageous and prestigious level of legal recognition—an *intesa*—that the Italian state had already granted to several non-Catholic religions following

11. Gervasoni, *Storia d'Italia degli anni ottanta*, 30–31.

12. Ginsborg, *Italy and Its Discontents*, 150–54; Gervasoni, *Storia d'Italia*, 33–38.

the religious reforms of 1984. Should the church be content with the limited set of legal and administrative benefits when, as one Italian church official noted, it is entitled under the Italian constitution “to legal status and privileges infinitely superior to those available to mere business or non-profit corporations”?

The rationale spelled out in memos and meetings emphasized that, without an *intesa*, the church would continue to be a lower-tier religion in Italy—dismissed as an insignificant American sect and ignored by government offices and ministries. Moreover, missionary activities could be halted at any time because non-Italian missionaries might be denied visas. With firsthand knowledge of the political climate in Italy, local Mormon leaders counseled church attorneys to discontinue the involvement of American and LDS diplomats in resolving legal problems with the Italian state because such assistance was only “marginally helpful” and “could be construed as a potentially counterproductive affront” to the Ministry of Interior and its Directorate of Religious Affairs.

The lobbying and unsolicited advice of local church leaders inevitably created some friction with officials and attorneys at the church’s European area headquarters in Frankfurt. It was a classic organizational dilemma in missionary outreach: imperatives and opinions at the local level clashing with requirements and perspectives at the international level. Local leaders bristled at the church attorneys’ dismissive attitude toward their inquiries and ideas and came to view the legal team as out of touch with realities on the ground in Italy. The attorneys, on the other hand, resented Italians questioning their decisions and meddling in complex matters that required the professional expertise of the legal office.

The tension between church attorneys and Italian church leaders resulted from a fundamental clash of philosophy about the nature and importance of legal recognition. The attorneys operated at the time under a minimalist approach: putting in place only the barest possible legal structure that would allow the church to function with as little difficulty as possible. As one of the church’s attorneys put it, “What is important about the process of recognition is how unimportant it is: the gospel, missionaries, members, and leaders are already there. Our goal is to create a

simple, transparent administrative system—only enough to allow the ecclesiastical programs to go forward.”

Poor communication and strong opinions on both sides exacerbated the controversy between local leaders and the legal office. Italian leaders and members seemed unaware of the behind-the-scenes efforts to start an intesa process and of the reasons underlying the eventual decision to pursue the ente instead. The attorneys, on the other hand, appeared to be unconvinced (and were perhaps ill advised) about the superiority of the intesa as compared to the ente, and they underestimated the profound importance of the psychological and social dimensions.

In addition to these external and internal tensions generated by the ente proposal, the application process required by the Ministry of Interior presented its own unique challenge to the church: a daunting set of bureaucratic hurdles including elaborate paper work, staggering fees, a nationwide vetting, and four levels of review and approval within the government. Submitting the application for ente status required a deposit of one million dollars to demonstrate the church's solvency. A background check on the reputation and activities of Mormon communities throughout Italy was carried out by each prefecture office.

After receiving the screening reports from all fifty-eight prefectures (a process that took more than three years) and following several months' delay for national elections and the formation of a new government in spring 1992, Interior officials issued their recommendations to the Council of State (a judicial advisory body) which, after review, referred the matter to the Council of Ministers (Cabinet) for discussion. Finally, with a positive decision from the Cabinet, the official decree granting ente patrimoniale status to the LDS Church was signed by President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro on 23 February 1993—nearly five years after submitting the original draft application to the Ministry of Interior.¹³

13. Technically, the church's new legal status did not become effective until almost three months later on 12 May, after the presidential decree was approved by the Court of Accounts (which reviews acts of government to ensure compliance with Italian law) and published in the Court record, the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*.

The church had made an important step forward in its efforts to secure a place in Italian public life. Following a long, circuitous, and at times contentious ordeal stretching across almost thirty years, the church had been officially recognized by the Italian state not merely as an American corporation with an Italian legal presence, as was previously the case, but as an Italian religious association with Italian legal identity.

The shift in status was subtle but significant. As the church's Italian legal adviser in Rome observed, approval of the ente patrimoniale did not obviously affect the everyday life of Mormons in Italy nor the church's day-to-day pastoral or humanitarian activities. But it did help facilitate administrative affairs. In announcing the recognition of the ente patrimoniale by the Italian state, President Spencer J. Condie of the Europe/Mediterranean Area office in Frankfurt noted another positive benefit for the church and its approximately 17,000 members in Italy: "The neighbors and business associates of Italian members of the church in 58 regions of the country were interviewed by the police regarding what kind of people the Italian Mormons are. The reports came back unanimously positive and this was part of the basis for the legal recognition. Our Latter-day Saints are a credit to their country and are outstanding citizens."¹⁴

Church members and leaders in Italy were grateful but remained somewhat reserved about the ente signing, viewing it as only a partial victory—one that allowed increased but not full access to religious benefits in the public square. However, in view of the daunting nature of the application process, the very real possibility of rejection at any one of the various levels of review and approval, the internal conflict between local and regional levels of church administration, the political headwinds in the halls of the Interior Ministry, and long delays caused by bureaucratic machinations and national elections, the church's achievement of the ente patrimoniale status was, by any measure, a significant achievement. The lessons learned, relations established, and status acquired due to ente recognition would prove to be indispensable

14. *Church News*, 12 June 1993, 4.

preliminary steps for the church in its progress toward the real prize: an intesa with the state.

A Hard-Won Intesa for the Mormons

In 1993, two more Protestant groups—the Baptists and Lutherans—succeeded in concluding agreements with the state. The series of historic intesa signings that followed the 1984 Agreement of Villa Madama elicited widespread acclaim among intellectuals and journalists. Valdo Spini, member of a prominent Waldensian family and Undersecretary in the Ministry of Interior, wrote that the agreements with the Waldenians, Adventists, and Assemblies of God “represent the conclusion of one of the longest and most difficult battles for religious liberty in contemporary Italy.”¹⁵ According to one scholarly assessment, the reforms would have positive and long-lasting repercussions for minority religions and civic life in Italy: “After a long phase of legal inertia . . . the new laws that came into effect with the recent intesa signings will provide new bases for the reconstruction of the system of church-state relations operating in the Republic.”¹⁶

By 1997, the church’s basic philosophy for seeking legal recognition, at least in Italy, had evolved significantly. It went from an approach focused on the legal, fiscal, and other administrative needs of the institution to one that also took into account the social and psychological repercussions for church members. “Outside of the United States,” one LDS attorney explained, “being part of a minority religion can be very difficult in your daily life, and having your religion enjoy a greater stature is worth a lot. The Church would invest in achieving this if there was no other reason.”¹⁷

A consensus had emerged that this arrangement “would be a substantially more favorable legal regime than the law generally

15. “Pentecostali e avventisti non sono più ‘pericolosi,’” *Il Giornale Nuovo*, 30 December 1986.

16. Broglio, “Libertà religiosa e sistema di rapporti tra Stato e Confessioni religiose,” 539, 548.

17. Carrie Levine, “For Italian Job, Mormons Ask a D.C. Insider for Help,” *National Law Journal*, 6 October 2009, <http://www.law.com/jsp/law/international/LawArticleIntl.jsp?id=1202434304372>.

applicable to religious associations” that governed the church’s activities under the 1993 ente.¹⁸ Echoing this theme, Italian scholar Massimo Introvigne compared approval of an intesa to “becoming a member of an elite club” that would represent an “important symbolic victory.” Not only would it guarantee “to all churches both more money and more freedom from state controls,” but in a broader sense it would help improve the image of Mormonism in areas of Europe where the church is still viewed as merely a cult.¹⁹

The timing of the church’s intesa application, submitted to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers on 9 May 1997, appeared to be propitious, and optimism among officials ran high. Public support for granting legal recognition to more religious groups was gaining momentum. Over the next several years, debate commenced in the media and in Parliament concerning a model law on religious freedom aimed at fostering “coexistence between different cultures and religions” and guaranteeing equal access to constitutional rights for all religious denominations in Italy.²⁰

Moreover, the mission president in Rome, Leone J. Flosi, was personally acquainted with Italian president Oscar Luigi Scalfaro. Flosi was a native of Pariana, Italy, who had emigrated to Chicago and joined the LDS Church. He had worked with Scalfaro in the mid-1980s on a joint Italian-American anti-crime campaign when Scalfaro was minister of interior and Flosi the legal attaché at the US embassy. In the intervening decade, Scalfaro had become the ninth president of the Italian Republic, but when the two met shortly after Flosi’s arrival in 1996, it was simply “a social visit between two old friends.” During their conversation, as Flosi described his new ecclesiastical duties in Rome, Scalfaro expressed surprise that the Mormons had churches in Italy.

18. For some of the material in this section, we are indebted to Giuseppe Pasta, official representative of the Church for institutional relations, who shared his meticulously documented record and chronology of the intesa effort: Giuseppe Pasta, “Report of a Strategic Relationship: The Government Relations Plan for Italy,” copy in James Toronto’s possession.

19. Cited in Peggy Fletcher Stack, “LDS Church Wants to Be Official in Italy,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 9 September 2000, A1.

20. “Italy Plans Model Law on Religious Freedom,” 15 May 2003, <http://www.zenit.org/article-7260?l=english>.

“Where is your church?” he asked. “Does your church believe in prayer?” It quickly became clear that the Italian president, like so many of his compatriots, “knew virtually nothing about the Church or its teachings and was unaware of our presence.”²¹

Scalfaro, however, was sympathetic to the plight of new religions in Italy, and was “aghast that we’re not legally recognized. He asked if there was anything he could do to help, and he philosophized about why it wasn’t right that a church should need to be recognized by a government.” Knowing that Scalfaro was a religious man, Flosi left him a framed copy of “The Family: A Proclamation to the World” and went away with the sober realization that “the church still is not well known in Italy.” Reflecting on the reasons for this, he concluded that “the bella figura concept is important to Italians—the importance of having nice buildings in the capital city is crucial to our coming out of obscurity” and that the church needed to build up a “representational presence” in the country’s capital.²² Flosi’s friendship with Scalfaro would also facilitate the 1998 meeting in which the Italian president hosted four church leaders—Dieter F. Uchtdorf (Europe West Area Presidency), Raimondo Castellani (Area Authority Seventy), Giuseppe Pasta (national director of Public Affairs), and Flosi—at the presidential palace and expressed his support for the church.²³

But after May 1997, inertia set in as months and years went by without signs of further progress. Church leaders began to write letters and make courtesy visits to various government officials to get advice and speed up dealings on the intesa. The campaign to break the logjam included a traditional Mormon tactic for solving problems: an appeal to higher powers. A letter issued by Elder Luigi Peloni, an Area Seventy, invited all members in Italy and anyone else who cared about “the gospel cause in Italy” to unite together on 7 September 2003, in “fasting, faith, and prayer”

21. Leone and Jeanne Flosi, Interview, 14 August 1999, Provo, UT; see also “Mission President Visits with Italian Leader,” *Church News*, 7 December 1996, 5.

22. Flosi, Interview.

23. “Italian President Greets Leaders, Reiterates Support of Families, Prayer,” 12; “News of the Church,” *Ensign*, April 1999, 78; Leone J. Flosi to James Toronto, Email, 8 August 2014.

because the process had reached “a phase of stalling without any prospect of imminent progress.”²⁴

Appeals went out to higher secular powers too. Castellani sent letters to President Carlo Azeglio Ciampi (Scalfaro’s successor) in November 2003 and to Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi in April 2004 pointing out that progress toward the *intesa*, initiated six years before, had ground to a halt since its approval by the Presidency of the Council more than two years earlier. “We fear,” he stated, “that prolonging the waiting period could be interpreted as the Italian State’s desire to slow down the process of granting *intese* that are provided for in Article 8 of the Constitution.” In December 2006, the presidency returned the draft with further revisions for the church’s consideration and response. Almost a decade had passed since the submission of the *intesa*, and no significant progress had been made.

With little communication from government functionaries, church officials had to depend on hearsay and speculation to understand the glacial pace of the process. Some insiders suggested that Mormonism’s history of polygamy and image as an American religion undermined support from the government. Evangelization of Catholics in Italy by Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and other missionary-oriented churches also may have stirred some opposition from the Roman Catholic hierarchy. Critics in Italy have accused the Conference of Italian Bishops (CEI) in Italy of influencing the Berlusconi government to block the approval of *intese* with non-Catholic religions in order to keep “the lion’s share” (about one billion euros per year) of tax revenue assigned annually to churches and state charities.²⁵

Analysts pointed to another important factor that hindered the *intesa* approval process. Opposition to Muslim immigration is

24. Email posted on bellasion.org on 18 August 2003.

25. Marco Politi, “La Chiesa, tre metri sopra l’Irpef,” *Il Fatto Quotidiano*, 18 August 2011, www.aetnanet.org. On the controversy surrounding Italy’s system of public financial support for religion, see Dimitri Buffa, “Otto, per mille chiese i regali di Cesare a Dio,” *L’Opinione*, 1 June 2005, <http://www.radicalparty.org/it/content/otto-mille-chiese-i-regali-di-cesare-dio>; and Laura Maragnani, “Nel nome del Padre e dell’8 per mille,” *Panorama*, 30 April 2005.

strong in some segments of Italian society, and the lobbying power of the Northern League and the disunity of the Islamic groups in Italy have so far prevented a Muslim intesa. Many politicians believed that opening the door for some non-Catholic groups would mean opening the door for Muslims as well. According to Massimo Introvigne, the "holdup" in discussions about pending agreements was due to fears in Parliament that granting a Muslim intesa would be "electoral suicide." Not doing so, he said, "could offend Muslim nations, leading Parliament to simply postpone votes on other pacts to avoid singling out one religion."²⁶ An in-house assessment of government inertia with respect to the church's intesa drew a similar conclusion: "The main stumbling block has been the *Lega Nord* (Northern League), a political party under the leadership of Mr. Bossi which apparently feared that an intesa with the LDS Church and some other churches that have filed such applications would pave the way to comparable agreements with the Muslim community which they strongly opposed. . . . It is possible that there is also some low level opposition to the intesa from Catholic officials."²⁷

In response to this logjam, the church's legal office began to examine new strategies for advancing the intesa process. In 2005, the legal counsel for the Europe West Area, John Zackrison, began consulting with church leaders and experts on church-state law and religious freedom issues in Italy. Out of those discussions emerged a key idea: that the legal recognition process is fundamentally political, not technical, in nature. In the words of one consultant, "The fallacy of our approach so far lies in assuming that the intesa application is a transparent, predictable legal procedure when in reality it is a rough-and-tumble political contest that can be won only by means of strong organization, influential allies, and lobbying muscle."²⁸ Based on this, Zackrison organized a task force with a goal to counter opposition, form alliances, and identify political advocates who would champion the Latter-day

26. Levine, "For Italian Job, Mormons Ask a D.C. Insider for Help."

27. Pasta, "Report of a Strategic Relationship: The Government Relations Plan for Italy," 4.

28. Notes in James Toronto's possession.

Saint cause and help push the intesa through to a successful conclusion. Luigi Peloni was appointed to be the chair of the new Italy intesa committee.

Beginning in March 2006, the committee's meetings focused on working toward a number of specific objectives: to develop positive relationships with members of the Parliament and Cabinet; to collaborate with other religious groups (including the Apostolic Church, the Orthodox Church, the Buddhist Union, and the Hindu Union) who were also stalled in their intesa application; to benefit from the advice of scholars like Silvio Ferrari and Massimo Introvigne; to seek ideas and technical assistance from experts such as APCO Worldwide, a political consulting firm with offices in Rome; to prepare public-relations packets containing helpful information about the church's intesa effort to leave with politicians, journalists, and government officials; and to continue building on the church's good relationships with the Catholic community.

Reflecting perhaps on the painful lessons of the ente patrimoniale recognition two decades before, the committee decided that, while maintaining good relations with the American government was important, "we should minimize the Embassy's involvement in the intesa process." Efforts to promote diplomatic contacts swung into action: in October 2006, a church delegation including Apostle Dieter F. Uchtdorf, US Senator Gordon Smith, and Peloni held a meeting in Rome with Professor Francesco Pizzetti, Prefect Mario Morcone, and Dottoressa Anna Nardini of the Prime Minister's secretariat, and with officials at the Vatican.

During this period, church leaders received two official invitations that afforded opportunity to increase the public profile of the church and to lend a Mormon voice to national debate in the halls of Parliament. On 9 January 2007, a church delegation joined representatives of other denominations seeking a first-time or amended intesa at the Montecitorio Palace in Rome, seat of the Chamber of Deputies. The occasion was a parliamentary inquiry concerning the proposed Law No. 134 on religious liberty sponsored by Deputy Valdo Spini, which had as its object "the implementation and specification of human rights constitution-

ally guaranteed" to all Italian citizens who belong to non-Catholic religious denominations. Faiths invited to express their views in the debate were the Waldensians, Jews, Evangelicals, Mormons, Hindus, Adventists, Buddhists, Jehovah's Witnesses, Baptists, Orthodox Christians, and Lutherans. In his turn at the podium, Luigi Peloni delivered a summary of Latter-day Saint history, beliefs, and views on Italy's laws concerning religious freedom. He also took the opportunity to make a plea to "to take necessary action so that the draft intesa [of the church] initialed by the government can be formalized as a legislative bill by the current Cabinet and forwarded to the Parliament."

The second high-profile occasion was a March 2007 meeting of LDS representatives with the Scientific Committee of the Interior Ministry tasked with advising the Council of Ministers on integration of immigrants in Italian society. APCO consultants advised leaders that this was a sign of trust and respect—"a great recognition to the church"—to be asked by the Italian State to share views on this vital social issue. Massimo De Feo, president of the Rome Stake, spoke on behalf of the Mormon delegation, outlining the church's worldwide growth, intercultural experience, and humanitarian assistance around the globe. Noting that approximately one-third of church members in Italy were non-European Union citizens, he spoke of the church's programs and language classes that facilitate active participation of immigrant members in the host society.

Following these positive developments, the long-awaited day came when Prime Minister Prodi, after approval from the Council of Ministers, signed the church's intesa on 4 April 2007, thereby completing the first step of the procedure. The next step would require the introduction of the intesa for debate in both houses of Parliament. This proved a much longer process than anyone would have anticipated. After a year passed with no progress, in March 2008, the intesa committee adopted a new tactic: building a coalition of eight religious denominations to more effectively lobby the Italian government. The Coalition for Religious Agreements consisted of five religious groups seeking an intesa (the LDS Church, the Orthodox Church, the Apostolic Church, the

Buddhist Union, and the Hindu Union), with support and participation by three groups who had already achieved *intesa* status (Evangelical Federation, the Seventh-day Adventists, and the Waldensian Methodist Church). The Jehovah's Witnesses, who had sought to conclude an *intesa* since the early 1990s, were also invited to join but declined. The objective of the coalition was "to raise awareness among Italian institutions and political decision makers in order that Parliament might ratify the religious *intese* that the churches in the coalition have already negotiated with the Italian government."²⁹

The political winds shifted a few months later from center-left to center-right when national elections returned Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi to power (May 2008). When LDS officials learned that US government support might now be an asset rather than a liability in their effort, they retained A. Elizabeth Jones, a registered lobbyist and a former high-level US diplomat, to represent the church in its relations with the American embassy in Rome.³⁰

The breakthrough to round two of the approval process occurred in May 2010 when Berlusconi and his Council of Ministers initialed the church's *intesa* and introduced it for debate in the Italian Senate. As the *intese* of six religions—the five coalition partners plus the Jehovah's Witnesses—came before the Senate in June, years of effort and collaboration on the part of the church committee and the interfaith coalition began to bear fruit. The relationships that the church and other coalition representatives had developed with members of Parliament proved crucial in advancing the debate on *intese* and religious rights and in assisting the church in its efforts to receive clearances to construct its first temple in Italy, which was announced in October 2008.

Although representing opposing sides of the political spectrum, Senators Lucio Malan and Stefano Ceccanti worked in bipartisan fashion in behalf of the five coalition groups. In July

29. See Coalizione per le Intese Religiose, "Brief History," http://www.coalizioneintesereligiose.it/jsps/portal/coalizione/chiesa_gesu_cristo_santi_ultimi_giorni.jsp.

30. Levine, "For Italian Job, Mormons Ask a D.C. Insider for Help."



Some representatives of the coalition and their political partners gathered to discuss plans and strategy. Left to right: Giuseppe Pasta, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Ms. Maria Falà, vice-president of the Buddhist Union; Ms. Dora Bognandi, pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church; Mr. Franco Di Maria, president of the Italy Hindu Union; Senator Vannino Chiti, vice-president of the Italian Senate; Archimandrite Symeone Catsinas, Orthodox Church; Senator Stefano Ceccanti, PD Party; Mr. Claudio Tanca, APCO; Senator Lucio Malan, PDL Party. Courtesy of Giuseppe Pasta, LDS Public Affairs, Italy.

2011, when the intese of these groups came up for debate in the Senate chamber, a press release stated Malan's rationale for cosponsoring the new legislation:

Our government is very active in the world in defense of human rights and in particular of persecuted Christians. It is only right that also here in Italy full realization be given to constitutional norms. These intese have taken as long as twenty years in passing the investigation of numerous government commissions. The denominations under consideration give every guarantee of

honoring their commitments, and there is no reason why they should continue to wait for approval.³¹

The intese of the Latter-day Saint, Orthodox, and Apostolic Churches were approved that same day following the first round of debate (“first reading”). The following year, on 30 July 2012,³² the president of the Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, formally signed the legislation, which took effect beginning 22 August 2012.³³

The approval of these three new intese—the first in almost twenty years, bringing the total number of religions in this “elite club” to nine—evoked positive reactions from many quarters in Italian society.³⁴ The Minister of International Cooperation and Integration, Andrea Riccardi, judged the intese approvals in Parliament to be “very positive,” underscoring the central role that these agreements play in promoting national unity.³⁵

31. Senator Lucio Malan, “Libertà Religiosa: Malan (PDL), Intese Calendarizzate per il 12 Luglio,” Press Release, Rome, Italy, 6 July 2011, copy of email in James Toronto’s possession. For more on relations between Waldensians and Mormons during the intesa campaign, see Mauro Properzi and James A. Toronto, “From Conflict to Collaboration: Mormons and Waldensians in Italy,” in *The Worldwide Church: Mormonism as a Global Religion* (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center; Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2016), 257–81.

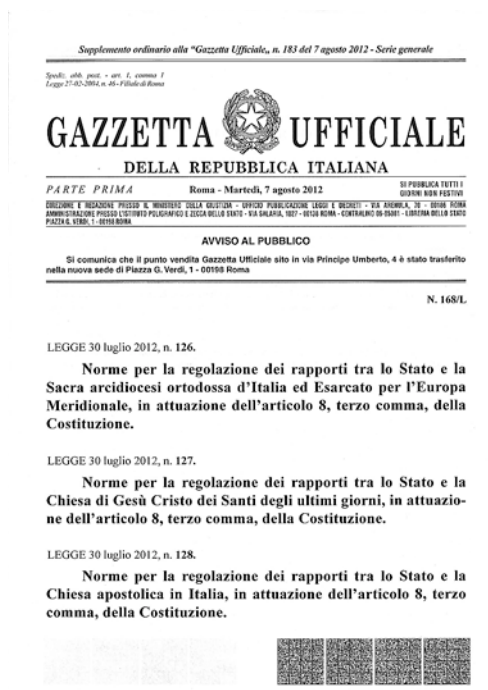
32. “Il Senato approva in via definitiva l’Intesa con la Chiesa di Gesù Cristo dei Santi degli Ultimi Giorni,” Press Release, 18 July 2012, <http://www.media-mormoni.it/articolo/il-senato-approva-intesa-con-la-chiesa-di-gesu-cristo>; Massimo Introvigne, “Italy enters into concordats with Mormons, Apostolic Pentecostals, and an Orthodox Church,” <http://www.cesnur.org/2012/mi1807.htm>; Peggy Fletcher Stack, “Italy Grants Mormon Church New Tax Status,” *Salt Lake Tribune* (19 July 2012); Jason Swenson, “Official Recognition in Italy: Members Thrilled with Legislation,” *Church News*, 12 August 2012, 3; “Mormons in Italy Rejoice, Church Granted Country’s ‘Official’ Status,” Mormon Newsroom, 3 August 2012, at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/mormons-italy-rejoice-church-granted-country-official-status>.

33. See the official record and a copy of the text of the church’s intesa, <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/guridb/dispatcher?service=1&datagu=2012-0807&task=dettaglio&numgu=183&redaz=012G0146&tmstp=1344374712391>.

34. In December 2012, intese with the Buddhists and Hindus were approved by the House of Deputies and became law in February 2013, bringing the total number of intese to eleven. Fabrizio Caccia, “Dopo L’Intesa Pronta a Roma ‘La Grande Pagoda,’” *Corriere della Sera*, 31 January 2013, [http://www.corriere.it/cronache/13_gennaio_30/baggio-guzzanti;Religioni:Zaccaria\(Pd\),ApprovateInteseConInduistiEBuddhisti,RisultatoStorico](http://www.corriere.it/cronache/13_gennaio_30/baggio-guzzanti;Religioni:Zaccaria(Pd),ApprovateInteseConInduistiEBuddhisti,RisultatoStorico); Agenparl, Roma, 11 December 2012, copy in James Toronto’s possession. See also <http://www.cesnur.org/2012/mi1807> and <http://www.ashramgita.com/en/>.

35. “Religione: Riccardi, bene intese con chiese non cattoliche,” ASCA: Agenzia Stampa Quotidiana Nazionale, 26 July 2012, http://www.asca.it/news-Religione_Riccardi_bene_intese_con_chiese_non_cattoliche-1181481-POL.html.

For the Mormon community, the benefits of the intesa began to accumulate almost instantly.³⁶ While the intesa unquestionably elevated the stature and image of the church at the national level, especially in diplomatic and government circles, the most obvious advantages were pragmatic in nature and affected the lives of church members at the local level. The intesa granted the church the status of "partner of the State," allowing it to operate with the full support of the government and much wider autonomy to serve the needs of its membership and Italian society as a whole.³⁷ Among other things, the intesa gave leaders unhindered access in their pastoral support for members in the military, in hospitals, and in prisons, and guaranteed confidentiality in their communications with members; permitted church members a modest tax deduction for charitable



The 7 August 2012 cover of the Gazzetta Ufficiale, containing the formal government announcement of Law No. 127 passed on 30 July 2012: the LDS Church's intesa with the Italian State. Courtesy of LDS Public Affairs, Italy.

36. Giuseppe Pasta, "Comunicato Stampa," LDS Church, 18 July 2012, copy in James Toronto's possession; and Joseph Walker, "LDS Church Granted Official Status in Italy," *Deseret News*, 6 August 2012, <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/865560142/LDS-Church-granted-official-status-in-Italy.html?pg=all>.

37. For details of the Church's intesa rights and benefits, and a pdf copy of the intesa text, see "Perché è importante l'Intesa con lo Stato italiano?," http://www.coalizioneintesereligiose.it/jsps/portal/coalizione/chiesa_gesu_cristo_santi_ultimi_giorni.jsp; and "Perché l'Intesa è tanto importante per la Chiesa?," Press Release, 20 July 2012, <http://www.media-mormoni.it/articolo/importanza-dell-intesa>.

donations; provided authorization for seminaries and institutes, with the possibility that courses might even be eligible for public school credit; allowed teaching of Latter-day Saint religion courses in public schools, if the church decided to do so; stabilized the visa situation for missionaries and mission presidents and the granting of residency permits; and denied police and military the right to enter and search church buildings without authorization.

A major advantage of achieving *intesa* status is the option of receiving public funds from annual federal tax revenues. However, the LDS officials made it clear that, for the time being, the church “does not request any financial contribution from the Italian State, and likewise does not request to be included in the distribution of funds from the 0.8% quota” of the personal income tax system (IRPEF—“Imposta sui Redditi delle Persone Fisiche”).³⁸ Competition for a larger share of these funds has led to corruption and controversy in the distribution and use of religious tax proceeds, and for this reason some churches have elected either to forgo participation altogether or to engage only on a partial basis.³⁹

Arguably, the controversial decision to seek first the *ente patrimoniale* status and then pursue the *intesa* was vindicated. Without the first step of the *ente*, the journey toward full partnership with the state may have been much more problematic and might well have failed. An official, with the benefit of hindsight, put it this way: “The *ente* created a clear platform that did not have the level of political risk associated with the *intesa*. Time has proven the inspiration for the decision in that it has provided a solid platform for the church to grow while we have worked to get our *intesa* in place.” But given the optimism and enthusiasm surrounding the blooming of religious freedom for minority groups and the numerous *intesa* signings in the late 1980s, no one could have predicted that the road to the *intesa* would be so fraught with obstacles and delays.

38. See Coalition website, http://www.coalizioneintesereligiose.it/jsps/portal/coalizione/chiesa_gesu_cristo_santi_ultimi_giorni.jsp.

39. Maragnani, “Nel nome del Padre e dell’8 per mille”; and Politi, “La Chiesa, tre metri sopra l’Irpef”; and Buffa, “Otto, per mille chiese i regali di Cesare a Dio.”

A Mormon Temple in Rome

On 4 October 2008, during the Saturday morning session of general conference in Salt Lake City, President Thomas S. Monson announced plans to construct a new temple in Rome, Italy. In church meetinghouses across Italy, where thousands of Italian members had gathered to view the conference by satellite broadcast, the news set off a wave of unrestrained elation. Many members leapt to their feet, exchanging hugs and kisses and weeping openly. One observer described the raucous scene as "animated cheering and enthusiasm you might expect to see in a sports arena during a last-second win."⁴⁰

Why the jubilant reaction to what might seem a rather banal bit of news? First, temples lie at the core of Latter-day Saint theology and differ from the regular chapels where members meet for Sunday worship services. "Temples are considered 'houses of the Lord'" where "marriage, baptism, and other ordinances that unite families for eternity" are performed and key doctrines are expounded.⁴¹ Mormons believe that the spiritual truths embodied in temple worship are essential to salvation and that they were central to ancient temple rites described in the Old and New Testaments. Practically speaking, the construction of a temple is viewed as the culminating event for LDS communities around the world, a kind of divine imprimatur—a symbol in stone—of God's acceptance of the local members' sacrifice and dedication over the years and recognition of their having reached a high level of maturity and self-sufficiency.

A second reason is that, from the beginning of Mormon missionary outreach to Italy, the temple has carried particular

40. Reid L. Nielsen, "Interview with Massimo De Feo, Stake President in Rome, Italy," Mormon Channel: Into All the World, 29 April 2009, 13 June 2009, http://feeds.lds.org/~r/LDSIntoAllTheWorld/~3/tvvN_Rtc1k4/LDSRadio_IntoAllTheWorld__01__MassimoDeFeo__eng_.mp3. See also the website Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Rome Italy Temple," <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/rome/>.

41. Mormon Newsroom, "President Monson Breaks Ground for Rome Italy Temple," 23 October 2010, <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/president-monson-breaks-ground-for-rome-italy-temple>; see "Why Mormons Build Temples," http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-x_-TQivCx8.



Italian church members often chartered buses for long-distance excursions together to participate in conferences and attend the temple in Switzerland. Shown here is a group from the Taranto Ward attending a conference in Rome in May 2005 for the creation of the new Rome Stake. Courtesy of James Toronto.

resonance for Italian Latter-day Saints. Two factors could account for this. Catholic culture, with its long tradition of creating magnificently designed and decorated religious architecture, seems to foster a deep reverence for sacred sites and space that many Italian converts carry with them into the Mormon community. Indeed, the family-centered focus of Italian society produced religious seekers for whom LDS teachings about the temple and the eternal nature of human relationships held great appeal.

Many Italian members had long been devoted participants in temple work in the closest temple, in Zollikofen, Switzerland. A report in the 1974 Italy North Mission history described participation in the first “Italian week” at the Swiss Temple. A total of sixty-seven men and women plus twenty children from the mission were in attendance. Sixteen couples were married, and the children were sealed to their parents and performed baptisms for

the dead. The temple president said that it was one of the best attended temple weeks in Europe. Many members “travelled long distances on hard-earned money to be able to attend.”⁴²

In southern Italy, members saved money from scarce incomes, chartered buses, and used vacation days to spend a week or two at the temple. A member of the Catania Ward, for example, explained that she and her husband made the thirty-hour, 1,000-mile trek by bus to the Swiss temple with their teenage children nearly every summer since the children were small. They stayed in the guest housing with other members from Sicily, enjoying the alpine climate and scenery and attending the temple. “Even though the trip is expensive and exhausting for our family, we do it each year because we want our children to be able to touch the temple and remember its spiritual importance in our lives.”⁴³

The dedication of Italian members to temple work impressed church leaders, and this was a factor in the decision to build a temple in Rome. One official at the Swiss temple estimated that perhaps “80% of all ordinances performed in the temple are done by Italian members, most of whom are from southern Italy . . . Italians have the spirit of genealogy and family history, especially in the south where the family concept is very similar. It’s in their roots, their DNA, to do genealogy and go to the temple where eternal family ties are forged. The Italian members are impelling the church [*costringendo la chiesa*] to consider building a temple in Italy by their faithful work in the Swiss temple.”⁴⁴

The Back Story of the Rome Temple

During his 1977 mission tour in Italy, Spencer W. Kimball broached the subject of a temple in Italy, the earliest indication by a senior church official that steady growth and maturation of the church augured favorably for temple construction in the future. A more focused effort began in 1980, when Ezra Taft Benson, during a stopover in Rome, asked for a meeting with Leone Flosi,

42. Italy Milan Mission, Manuscript History, 24 May 1974.

43. Roberta Battezzato, Interview, 5 June 2010.

44. Vincenzo Conforte, Interview, 27 May 2005.

then a counselor in the Rome mission presidency. During the fifteen-minute meeting, held in the TWA lounge at the Fiumicino airport, Elder Benson informed Flosi that church leaders were anxious to find property in Italy for a temple and assigned him to make a systematic search for a site. During the next seven years, working with several mission presidents, Flosi found “many possibilities and proposals” but encountered numerous obstacles and was unable to complete the task before he returned to the United States.⁴⁵ In subsequent years, church leaders made sporadic attempts to find a location and property suitable for a temple.⁴⁶

The search for a suitable plot of land gained new momentum when Flosi returned to Rome as mission president in 1996, already intent on establishing “a visible presence [for the church] in Rome, the capital of Christianity.”⁴⁷ During a meeting a few months after Flosi’s arrival, Dieter F. Uchtdorf, president of the Europe West Area, assigned him to renew his search for a temple site that the church could buy. Drawing on his previous experience, contacts, and knowledge of Rome and its environs, he finally succeeded in locating a promising fifteen-acre parcel of agricultural land on a small hill, complete with an old farmhouse and groves of Roman pines and olive trees, at Via di Settebagni, 376, near the main ring road surrounding Rome, the Grande Raccordo Anulare.⁴⁸ A few weeks after Flosi’s release in June 1999, the church closed its purchase of the property. For the next nine years the land and villa remained undeveloped and unused except as living quarters for missionaries and as a site for mission social activities from time to time.⁴⁹

Though the announcement in October 2008 of the church’s intention to build a temple in Rome surprised and delighted church members, it created concerns among the team of LDS property managers and legal advisors tasked with turning policy

45. Flosi, Interview.

46. See, for example, Italy Rome Mission, Manuscript History, 9 June 1989.

47. Flosi, Interview.

48. Fabrizio Caccia, “I Mormoni Puntano su Rome: primo tempio accanto a Ikea,” *Corriere della Sera* (6 October 2008), 23.

49. Craig Pacini to James Toronto, Email, 11 August 2014.

decisions from church headquarters into tangible realities on the ground. Indeed, some team members had lobbied authorities in Salt Lake City, urging postponement of the announcement. They were keenly aware of the entanglements that had halted progress on the Paris France Temple and hoped to avoid a similar fate in Italy. In this case, they would face a daunting task: figuring out how to negotiate the notoriously enigmatic maze of political and bureaucratic hurdles that had to be cleared in order to proceed with construction of any new building—let alone a Mormon temple—in the Eternal City.

These potential hurdles included the presence of gigantic power lines that ran through the property, zoning laws that would limit construction space, archeological evaluations that normally move at a snail's pace, the need for a building permit that required approval by eighteen separate municipal departments, and the necessity of gaining political support from the mayor's office and the Catholic Church. Conservative estimates, based on the historical *modus operandi* in Rome, suggested a waiting time of five to seven years before all the clearances could be secured and construction could actually begin.⁵⁰

As both the ecclesiastical and administrative branches of church organization swung into action, a number of key developments created a relatively smooth pathway to obtaining the required clearances and avoiding the typical bureaucratic gridlock and long delays. Zoning ordinances were one of the main problems inhibiting construction on the church property. Half of it was designated as green space and was therefore unavailable for building; the other half was designated as public use, and it was unclear whether building a religious structure (like a chapel or a temple) would be allowed under that category. About the time of the announcement, city officials started redoing the master zoning contract and unexpectedly designated both halves of the property as public use. They also added a note that the church's

50. Much of the material in this section comes from interviews with John Zackrisson, 13 May 2011, Provo, UT, and Massimo De Feo, 14 June 2011, Rome, Italy.

plans included buildings that were cultural and educational in nature and therefore qualified as public use.

Another potential problem was obtaining archeological clearances, which delay or halt many Roman building projects. It was extraordinary, then, that the Department for Cultural Supervision of Archeology, after systematic test digs throughout the property, discovered no significant ruins, while not far beyond the property line lay ancient Roman houses. Within a few months the archeological department had given the green light to move ahead with construction plans. The Mormon faithful who had fasted and prayed for a quick clearance by the Italian bureaucracy believed it was a sign of divine intervention.

The thorniest issue facing church officials in Italy was how to engender political support in the halls of power for the construction proposal. Simply put, the temple project could not go forward without a building permit that would require two things: (1) the tacit or explicit support of the mayor of Rome, and (2) no major opposition from the Catholic Church. It was at this point that a breakthrough occurred as the two tracks of the intesa effort and the temple project began to merge. Lessons learned, relations fostered, and reputations established during the previous twenty years of seeking legal recognition from the Italian government began to pay dividends in garnering goodwill and approvals for temple construction.

A few months after the temple announcement, the church's public relations firm in Rome, APCO, helped arrange a meeting between Dallin H. Oaks, an apostle, and Gianfranco Fini, a leading politician in Berlusconi's People of Freedom (PdL) party and newly elected as the president (speaker) of the Chamber of Deputies in the Italian Parliament. The two men connected easily and enjoyed a cordial conversation, in the course of which Oaks mentioned that it was the church's intention to build a temple in Rome. As the meeting concluded, Fini said to Oaks, "When you send your application into the city, let me know." Fini, it turned out, was a personal friend and political ally of Gianni Alemanno,

the mayor of Rome. Officials accepted Fini’s offer and contacted him when submitting their application for a building permit.

The Fini-Alemanno alliance, however, was only one part of the formula to facilitate the Mormon petition at city hall. The church’s team of Italian advisors helped devise a two-pronged strategy to expedite approval of the temple project: (1) to avoid a public hearing on the permit application, and (2) to have a one-time consolidated review of the application, rather than the normal protracted review by each of eighteen municipal departments. A rejection of either of these requests by the building department would constitute a serious setback and cause enormous delays. But the team of experts who represented the church during the petition meeting (held in July 2009) with the municipality included one of Rome’s most highly respected planning architects and a building permit lawyer for the bishop who controlled all the Catholic Church’s property in the city.

The outcome of their presentation to city officials could not have been more favorable for the church. Zackrison described the moment he received the good news: “Our [Italian] planning architect came out of the meeting floating. He rode everywhere on his scooter. He called me on the phone while he was riding on his scooter—I could hear the honking, the noise of the city. He said to me, ‘I don’t know what you guys have, I don’t know what this is about, but that’s the best meeting I’ve ever had in my experience.’”⁵¹ The building department granted both requests and required no hearing and provided a consolidated one-day review.

A little more than one year later, the city of Rome approved and issued the building permit, and plans for the groundbreaking ceremony were begun. The permit application had been approved, in Zackrison’s words, “with unheard of alacrity,” and the church’s Italian public relations and legal advisers called the quick turnaround “shockingly simple and fast.” President De Feo described his own experience as part of the team who worked with the Rome municipality, pointing to the improving image of church

51. Zackrison, Interview.

members in Italian society and government as a key component of the successful temple bid (a theme that also emerged from the *intesa* process):

We expected many obstacles for a project of this kind, but there weren't any really. To receive authorization to build a complex of four buildings usually takes about seven years, and we received it in one—without having to compromise our values [i.e., by paying bribes]. All of the doors opened up, one after another. The first time I went to city hall to meet the mayor's deputy, I spoke about the members of the church, the Mormons. This official said, "Yes, yes—I know them. I don't know what you preach or the details of your religion, but I know you are good people actively involved in Christian service. We know your young people. You are an example, and we will help you."⁵²

While marshaling support in the corridors of political power, church officials also sought to minimize opposition that might arise in the corridors of religious power: the Vatican. This entailed cultivating positive relations with key Catholic leaders so that they would not stand in the way of the Mormon temple project. But questions of whom to contact and how to gain access proved vexing. A breakthrough came in January 2009, when Zackrison and Emanuele Turco, another legal adviser for the church, were invited to attend a VIP reception in Rome put on by the US ambassador to the Vatican, Mary Ann Glendon. The invitation was facilitated by the fact that Glendon had been a Harvard Law professor and knew Zackrison and Turco, both of whom were Harvard Law graduates.

The keynote speaker was Cardinal Jean-Louis Tauran, head of the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue—one of the Vatican officials with whom church leaders had hoped to meet eventually and discuss the temple and the *intesa*. Cardinal Bernard Law, who also had Boston ties from his long tenure there as archbishop, was seated next to Zackrison during dinner. Upon learning that Mormon officials were interested in establishing

52. De Feo, Interview.

better relations with the Catholic Church, Cardinal Law walked Zackrison across the room and introduced him to Cardinal Tauran, who invited Zackrison to arrange a meeting. This took place in May, when Elder Gérard J. Caussé of the European Area Presidency met with Tauran. The two Frenchmen established an immediate bond when they discovered that both hailed from the same home town, Bordeaux, and had attended the same high school. With pleasantries completed and the French connection warmly established, Tauran leaned over and asked, “Are you having any trouble building your temple in Rome? If you have any problems, you let me know.” In the months after this meeting, Cardinal Tauran—a fervent advocate of interfaith respect and cooperation—was instrumental in organizing a series of meetings at the Vatican between high-ranking Catholic and Mormon officials.

Mormon efforts at rapprochement with the Catholic Church, carried out over many years both in Italy and the United States, no doubt helped allay concerns that the Vatican might have harbored about a Mormon temple in the neighborhood. Regarding the church’s bid for both the intesa and the temple in Italy, John Zackrison observed that “we haven’t had any problems that I can tell from the Catholic Church. I think it is part of the pattern of us really becoming a lot more closely aligned and cooperative.” Massimo Introvigne believes that presidential politics in the United States may have also contributed to a higher profile for Mormons in Italy and improved relations with Catholic officials: “Now Mormons are generally associated with [presidential candidate Mitt] Romney. . . . The Romney phenomenon has increased the interest for Mormonism in the Vatican. There, the authorities look for information from scholars and from [Catholic] bishops in the United States, whose views of the Mormons are quite balanced and mostly positive. This is balanced by negative views by bishops in Latin America and elsewhere afraid of Mormon missionaries’ proselytism.”⁵³

53. Peggy Fletcher Stack, “When in Rome . . . You’ll Soon See a Mormon Temple,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, 30 May 2012. For further insight on the “Romney effect” in Italy, see Mauro Properzi, “Mitt Romney and ‘I Mormoni’: A 2012 Analysis of Italy’s Print Media,” *BYU Studies* 53, no. 1 (2014): 75–105. According to Anna Nardini,

Unfortunately, but predictably perhaps, given the speculation, half-truths, and rumors swirling around the Rome Temple project from its inception, popular myths concerning Vatican “approval” of the temple sprang to life in late 2009 among some Mormons and quickly picked up momentum on the Internet. As the emails circulated more widely, embellishments and misinformation proliferated. Zeal for the miraculous filled in details that reliable firsthand sources had not provided. According to the exaggerated version of events, the Vatican ultimately gave its permission for the Mormons to build their temple in Rome in gratitude for Latter-day Saint leadership in promoting the passage of California’s Proposition 8 (banning same-sex marriage) in 2008, a cause championed also by the Catholic Church and several other religious organizations. Building a temple in Rome, the populist account averred, required consent from both the mayor of Rome and the pope himself. At a reception in Rome, the church attorney allegedly met the one cardinal who was charged with approving the temple on behalf of the pope and discussed the issue with him. The cardinal then promised that “we will support you in any effort you want because of your support of Proposition 8 in California.”

Eventually, with myth getting ahead of truth, Zackrisson felt impelled to issue a statement setting the record straight and correcting some inaccuracies:

None of the Catholic leaders we met said “We will support you in any effort you want because of your support of Proposition 8 in California.” Not only does the Catholic Church have no official decisional role with regard to the Rome temple, it has not made any commitment of support, whether because of Proposition 8 or otherwise. What is true is that at the reception I attended in Rome in January 2009, there were several Catholic officials who were aware of the church’s work in California on Proposition 8 and who thanked me as a representative of the church for that

the Mormons’ intense effort and reputation among Italian politicians also “greatly benefited from the exposure that Mitt Romney’s candidacy gave to the church and to its teachings.” Interview, 27 May 2014, cited in Properzi and Toronto, “From Conflict to Collaboration: Mormons and Waldensians in Italy,” 268.

good work. They were grateful that the church and its members had acted so vigorously and well in defense of our common principles. . . . We need to be cautious and judicious when we discuss what is happening there and should take care not to spread incorrect information.⁵⁴

On 23 October 2010, after two years of clearing political and bureaucratic hurdles and searching for a suitable Italian construction firm, the groundbreaking ceremony for the Rome Temple was held. The decision of Thomas S. Monson to preside personally on this occasion underscored the significance of this temple. In his speech, President Monson returned to a common leitmotif, reminding those present that Mormons honor and obey the laws of the land in which they live as well as the laws of God. He noted Rome’s historic role as a worldwide center of religion and culture and observed that the Latter-day Saint temple complex, benefiting from its Rome location, would serve as a gathering place for church members and visitors not only from Italy but also from throughout the Mediterranean region.

Italian government dignitaries attending the event included Giuseppe Ciardi, representing the mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno, and Senator Lucio Malan, a Waldensian who had been a close ally in the long intesa campaign. Malan, an ardent advocate of religious liberty, hailed the groundbreaking as “a positive day for Italy because those who profess to obey the laws of the state and the laws of God make the country in which they live a better place.”⁵⁵

Localizing the Design of the Temple Complex

The Rome temple will constitute a religious and cultural center—a temple complex, one of only a few of its kind in the Mormon community—consisting of four buildings: (1) a temple, the

54. Zackrisson to James Toronto, Email, 15 December 2009.

55. Detailed coverage of the Rome Temple groundbreaking ceremony can be found on the official website for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/president-monson-breaks-ground-for-rome-italy-temple>.



Thomas S. Monson, LDS Church President, along with Giuseppe Ciardi representing the mayor of Rome, Gianni Alemanno, and two Italian children during the groundbreaking ceremony for the Rome Italy Temple complex, 23 October 2010. Courtesy of Mormon Newsroom.

centerpiece of the complex; (2) a visitors' center where artwork and exhibits will explain the history and teachings of the Mormon faith; (3) a stake center (multiuse chapel) where church members in the Rome area will gather for organizational meetings, social functions, and Sunday worship; and (4) an accommodation center to provide lodging for church members who must travel long distances to participate in temple activities. The visitors' center and the stake center, along with a family history/genealogy center and the gardens surrounding the temple complex, will be accessible to the general public. A unique feature of the complex (compared to other LDS temple sites) will be the presence of a solar farm that will generate power for all of the buildings and support the push by city government to promote green projects in Rome.⁵⁶

In recent years, the church has adopted a policy of building smaller temples in closer proximity to the people and requiring architects to incorporate design motifs from local traditions and history. The architectural firm hired to design the temple complex worked with LDS officials and local Italian artisans to create a concept that expresses the dignity and meaning of the temple in Mormon life yet reflects "a sense of Italian design."⁵⁷ To that end, architects set out to understand the question "What is Italian?" in terms of architectural elements, and during several trips to Italy they visited dozens of historic sites and drew hundreds of sketches capturing styles, coloring, and motifs in exterior and interior space around Rome. The aim was not to compete with Roman or Renaissance or Catholic architecture but to come up with something unique that combined aspects of both Italian and Mormon heritage. In the baptistry font of the Rome Temple, for example, decorative bands feature acanthus leaves and other elements

56. Material in this section is compiled from Niels Valentiner, Speech at the Salt Lake University Institute of Religion, 27 February 2012, notes in James Toronto's possession; Mormon Newsroom, "President Monson Breaks Ground for Rome Italy Temple," <http://www.mormonnewsroom.org/article/president-monson-breaks-ground-for-rome-italy-temple>; and Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Rome Italy Temple," <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/rome>.

57. Valentiner, Speech, 27 February 2012.



An artist's rendering of the Rome Italy Temple complex. Courtesy of Mormon Newsroom.

of Roman architecture and pottery that create a classical feel, deepening the sense of solemnity and familiarity for Italian temple patrons. The curved walls of the exterior are constructed from granite with decorative glazing while the interior finish includes marble, woodwork, and Venetian plaster. All of the glass in the temple is uniquely designed leaded art glass, and chandeliers were custom made in Italy. In anticipation of the large parties typical of many Italian weddings, a third floor was added to the temple to provide ample space for large sealing rooms.

The iconic role of the piazza—the town square—in Italian life emerged early on as a central element of the temple complex design. In a piazza, the head architect explained, “you sit down to eat, and you have a feel of buildings around you. We knew we had

to express the sense of a piazza so that once you walked on the temple site, you knew you were in Italy."⁵⁸ The core design of the temple complex, then, grew out of this effort to capture the feel of the Italian piazza surrounded by buildings with a water fountain at its center. Originally, architects started with three buildings enclosing the temple piazza, with the temple itself having one spire crowned. Eventually, however, the First Presidency directed the design team to add another spire on the temple and another building, the visitors' center, which helped complete a center of four buildings wrapping around a piazza.

The visitors' center of the temple complex provides exhibits, films, and guided tours to explain the history and beliefs of Mormonism, including the role of the temple in LDS life. The main feature of the center is a display of full-size marble reproductions of Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen's *Christus* and the twelve apostles of Christ's time.⁵⁹ The marble for this massive project was cut from the Michelangelo Quarries in Carrara, the source for some of Michelangelo's most famous works. The original statues were digitally mapped, and these images were used by artisans in the Studi D'Arte workshop in Carrara to hand-carve precise replicas of the originals from large blocks of marble.⁶⁰

58. Valentiner, Speech, 27 February 2012.

59. The original works currently reside in the national cathedral of Denmark, the Vor Frue Kirke (Church of Our Lady), in Copenhagen. Thorvaldsen, who spent nearly 40 years of his life in Rome, was commissioned in 1819 to produce the thirteen statues and a baptismal font as part of a renovation program in the Copenhagen cathedral. All of these marble works were sculpted in Rome and then shipped to Denmark after their completion in 1838. See the website of the Studi D'Arte Cave Michelangelo at <http://www.studidarte.com>; Thorvaldsen Museum website at <http://www.copenhagenet.dk/cph-map/cph-thorvaldsen.asp>; and Ryan Carreon, "LDS Visitors Center in Rome to Feature Recreated Christus Statue," *Deseret News*, 27 October 2012.

60. For video about this process, see "October 2012 World Report: Christus Statue Re-created for Rome Italy Temple Visitors' Center," LDS Public Affairs (published 10 October 2012) at http://www.youtube.com/watch?feature=player_embedded&v=44APAr51B9k or on the website Temples of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Rome Italy Temple," <http://www.ldschurchtemples.com/rome/video>.

Assessing the Mormon Moment in Italy

Predictably, views about the impact of the Rome Temple on Mormonism's growth and image in Italy have varied. On the more positive side, a Utah newspaper, the *Salt Lake Tribune*, placed the Italian temple in a global context: "More than practically any other place, planting a temple in the Eternal City, not far from the seat of Catholicism, carried a symbolic significance for the Utah-based faith. It seemed to say: Mormons have arrived on the world stage and are here to stay."⁶¹

Mormon leaders in Italy emphasized the benefits that will accrue in terms of heightening the profile of the church among Italians while also burnishing Italy's reputation as a religiously pluralistic and tolerant nation. Raimondo Castellani, national director of Public Affairs and former president of the Swiss Temple, viewed the Rome temple as a visible symbol that Italian Mormons are finally part of Italy's cultural and religious environment and as a bridge to more meaningful relations with other religions: "I joined the Church when I was 33 years old. . . . I believe that the Catholic Church is still looking at the Church with some suspicion, mostly because of misinformation. But I think there is a good dialogue."⁶² Massimo De Feo, president of the Rome Stake, stated that the temple was a tipping point for the future of Mormonism in Italy: "The temple will make the difference for the Church in Italy. . . . The temple and the intesa together will surely make the church known in Italy as it never has been before. We will no longer be pioneers but will have the church established at the levels of local and federal government, at the level of our national image, at the level of spirituality and priesthood."⁶³

Massimo Introvigne, while concurring that the temple and intesa will provide Mormons a platform "to explain what 21st-century Mormonism is all about," also interjected a dose of caution into the discussion. "The Mormons are still poorly known in Italy," he noted, adding that a CESNUR survey found that many

61. Stack, "When in Rome . . . You'll Soon See a Mormon Temple."

62. Stack, "When in Rome . . . You'll Soon See a Mormon Temple."

63. De Feo, Interview.

Italians still believed "that Mormons—who account for fewer than half a percent of the country's populace—still practiced polygamy, though the Church officially gave it up more than a century ago." In his estimation, the physical siting of the temple, located like the religious centers of the Muslims and Jehovah's Witnesses in suburban neighborhoods far from downtown Rome, will adversely affect its public relations impact: "In fact the [Mormon] temple . . . will be just as invisible as the [Monte Antenne] mosque is."⁶⁴

Whatever one's opinion might be on the long-term significance of the temple and intesa, the arrival of the "Mormon Moment" in Italy presents an instructive story—rich with irony, controversy, faith, and intrigue. Religious minorities in Italy must confront a paradox: how to practice their faith and understand their place in a society that promotes religious freedom but not religious equality. The growth and evolution of the church plays out against a backdrop of a changing nation passing through profound legal, social, and political transformation. Whether one contemplates the long history of Waldensian and Jewish struggle for an equal place in the Italian square, or whether one considers the fierce resistance in American society to integration of African Americans, Catholics, Mormons, and Muslims, our study of the Mormon experience reminds us that, in Italy as elsewhere, a declaration of civil rights is a far cry from the realization of civil rights.

The salient point is that religious equality in any country is not freely granted. It is a closely guarded commodity that the State distributes, selectively and incrementally; political acumen and lobbying muscle, not a transparent legal process, determine the recipients. In short, religious, ethnic, and other social minorities attain their constitutionally guaranteed rights and freedoms not by requesting them but by seizing them, most effectively in league with individuals and groups who share common cause.

64. Stack, "When in Rome . . . You'll Soon See a Mormon Temple."