

LDS Prospects in Italy for the Twenty-first Century

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WHEN APOSTLE LORENZO SNOW WAS CALLED in 1849 to “establish a mission in Italy and wherever the spirit should direct,”¹ he was initially optimistic that the Waldensians, a Protestant group in the Kingdom of Sardinia (Piedmont), would be receptive. Like others, he believed they had “been the means of preserving the doctrines of the gospel in their primitive simplicity.”² He hoped that Waldensian converts would spread the gospel message to the larger Catholic population in Piedmont and the other *statarelli* on the Italian peninsula.³ Snow was disappointed, for the Italian

1. Eliza R. Snow Smith, *Biography and Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Co., 1884). A comprehensive history of the Italian mission has not been written. For a short sketch, see my “The Italian Mission, 1850-1867,” *Sunstone* 7 (May-June 1982): 16-21.

2. *Sketches of the Waldenses* (London: Religious Tract Society, 1846), 14-15, quoting Alexis Mustin, *Histoire des Vaudois* (Paris: F. G. Levrault, 1834), v. Although Snow did not identify this Religious Tract Society publication, the content of his letters written during his mission (see Snow, *The Italian Mission* [London: W. Aubrey, 1851]) demonstrates that it influenced his initial enthusiasm about the Waldensians. The theme of the tract—commonly accepted by many Protestants in the nineteenth century—is that the Waldensians were preserved from the corruption of the Catholic church and were a remnant of the primitive church because of their remote mountain location. Two poems contained in the tract were republished by Snow in *The Italian Mission*. One, “Hymn of the Vaudois Mountaineers in Times of Persecution,” written by Felicia Hemans and first appearing in her *Scenes and Hymns of Life* in 1834, was adapted and published in the 1863 edition of the Mormon hymnal as “For the Strength of the Hills We Bless Thee.”

3. Snow, *The Italian Mission*, 11. William Gilly and other Protestant conformists—whose views were reflected by the Religious Tract Society—did not advocate “converting” Waldensians but did envision using them to convert Catholics. See William Gilly, *Narrative of an Excursion to the Mountains of Piemont* (London: C. and J. Rivington, 1824). Snow’s plan to “convert” the Waldensians was later followed by other non-traditional religious groups, including Seventh-Day Adventists (1864) and Jehovah’s Witnesses (1908), who also began their proselyting activities in Italy among the Waldensians. See 1982 *Yearbook of Jehovah Witnesses* (Brooklyn: Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society, 1982), 117-34, 238-42; and D. A. Delafield, *Ellen G. White in Europe* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1975).

mission attracted fewer than 200 converts, all of whom emigrated or were excommunicated, before the mission was closed in 1867.⁴

Almost a century later the Italian mission reopened in 1966. During the next three decades approximately 16,000 joined the church. Although these are encouraging results, they are modest compared to those of some non-Catholic churches in Italy (Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, and other Pentecostals) or even to those of most LDS missions in the United States and Latin America. The prospects for Mormonism in Italy during the twenty-first century will depend on a variety of factors, of course, but one of the most important is political. In order to project church growth into the next century, it is necessary to understand the relationship between church and state in Italy during the past 150 years, which has been influenced more by the increasing secularization of society than by the increasing presence of minority religions.

CHURCH AND STATE

During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries church-state relations in Italy have undergone many permutations. Throughout most of this period the Catholic church enjoyed a legal monopoly, except for an interlude of secularization during the Napoleonic period (1796-1814), after which the Treaty of Vienna (1815) restored the Catholic protections and privileges in the various Italian *statarelli*.⁵ There was no separation of church and state, and the church had juridical parity with the state.⁶ The revolutionary agitations of 1848 forced King Carlo Alberto of Sardinia (with capital in Turin) and other rulers of the *statarelli* to loosen some Catholic control over their citizens. Although the Catholic church remained the official state religion, certain civil privileges were granted for the first time to non-Catholic minorities (mostly Jews and Waldensians); but it was the movement to unify Italy (the "Risorgimento") by the Kingdom of Sardinia that sharpened the conflict between the church and state;

4. Snow overestimated the extent of religious liberty in Piedmont. Royal edicts prohibited publication of tracts hostile to the Catholic church. See Vittorio Emanuele I, *Regio Editto* (Torino: Stamperia Reale, 10 June 1814), para. 13, which prohibited publication of books and scriptures without a license and introduction and sale without permission of books originating in foreign countries or critical of "Religion." Article 28 of the *Statuto*, "ordained" by Carlo Alberto in 1848, also prohibited publication of Bibles, catechisms, and liturgical and prayer books without permission of the Catholic bishop. Although Snow understood these limitations, he attempted nominal compliance by including woodcuts in an 1851 tract which contained the following Catholic symbols: Catholic Nun, anchor, Monstrance (which he confused with a lamp), cross, Noah's ark, dove, and olive. See Snow, *The Italian Mission*, 22-25.

5. Lucy Riall, *The Italian Risorgimento: State, Society, and National Unification* (London: Routledge, 1994).

6. See William Halperin, *The Separation of Church and State in Italian Thought from Cavour to Mussolini* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937).

and disagreements arose concerning the prerogatives of the church in civil matters. Since Pope Pius IX was not only Supreme Pontiff of the Catholic church but also leader of a sovereign nation, he opposed unification of the Italian *statarelli* (since it would result in the annexation of the Papal States) and the separation of church and state in any of the *statarelli* (since it would reduce the prerogatives of the church in civil affairs). Thus "the Catholic church did not play a spontaneous role like religion in the early United States, where the ethical fabric of democracy was formed by Christian experience . . . [and] [i]n Britain [where] the Labour Party and the Tories spring from Christian roots."⁷ The prime minister of Sardinia, Camillo Cavour, attempted to overcome this resistance by proclaiming in 1860 that there would be "a free church in a free state."⁸ As the expanded Kingdom of Sardinia became the Kingdom of Italy in 1861, King Victor Emmanuel II, backed by the Italian senate, implemented the Cavour formula more fully.⁹ By 1871, even though the Catholic church was still the official state church and the Kingdom had renounced any powers over it, civil matrimony was recognized and measures adopted which undermined the civil powers and privileges of the clergy. The Catholic church eventually reconciled itself to the political realities of Italy by allowing the formation of a political party to advance church interests and by permitting its members once again to stand for office and vote in elections.¹⁰

7. Pietro Scoppola, *La Repubblica dei Partiti* (Bologna: Mulino, 1991), 95, in Charles Richards, *The New Italians* (London: Penguin Books, 1995), 178-79.

8. A Catholic Cardinal writing in the Jesuit publication *La Civiltà Cattolica* in 1860 pointed out that even the Mormons in Utah were unwilling to separate church and state, and argued that the American church had borrowed this and other fundamental tenets (including infallibility) from the Catholic church. See "Il Mormonismo nelle sue attinenze col moderno Protestantismo," *La Civiltà Cattolica* 6 (3 May 1860): 411-12. Joseph F. Smith, during a mission to England, kept himself informed on Italian church-state debates by purchasing a pamphlet in early 1875 written by William Gladstone, *The Vatican Decrees in Their Bearing on Civil Allegiance: A Political Expostulation* (London, 1874). Papal and Mormon "infallibility," which were compared in the 1860 article in *La Civiltà Cattolica*, were also compared in the wake of Vatican I in "Brigham Young and the Pope," *Mormon Tribune* 1 (18 June 1870): 196; and in "Papal and Mormon Infallibility," *Salt Lake Tribune* 2 (20 Aug. 1870): 4.

9. Sixteen years after Cavour's death, Wilford Woodruff included him in a list of "eminent men" for whom baptisms were performed in the St. George temple on 21 August 1877. Other historically prominent Italians have also received baptisms, including Dante, St. Francis of Assisi, Pope John XXIII, Mazzini, and Mussolini, along with many early Waldensians. See Michele L. Straniero, "Il Duce e un papa fatti mormoni," *La Stampa*, 3 Dec. 1991, 14; and Massimo Introvigne, "Da Dracula a Mussolini, acqua santa su tutti i vip," *Avvenire*, 6 June 1995, 21.

10. In 1870, following the invasion of Rome, Pope Pius IX issued his famous *Non expedit* which prohibited Catholics from standing for office or voting in elections. Although *Non expedit* was formally revoked in 1919 when the first Catholic church party was formed, the church has not modified its position that it is improper to separate the church from the state. The church continues to argue against such separation. See *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 6 July 1911; Halperin, 77.

Under Benito Mussolini (1922-45) the Lateran accords were negotiated between the Kingdom and the Vatican. Under these accords the Vatican was recognized as a sovereign state by the king; compensation was paid to the papacy for the annexation of Rome; it was agreed that stipends would be paid to the clergy from government funds; and the Kingdom made concessions in matters of education and marriage. The treaty also reconfirmed that the Catholic church was the official church of Italy. After the fall of Mussolini and fascism at the end of World War II, the constitution of the new Republic of Italy recognized the Lateran accords, including the official status of the Catholic church, but for the first time extended religious liberty to non-Catholic religions. The new republic also entered into separate agreements with some minority religions extending certain tax advantages and recognizing the validity of their marriage ceremonies. Since the end of World War II Italians have become increasingly secular in their outlook. In 1970 the Italian Parliament legalized divorce (which was confirmed by referendum in 1974), and in 1981 a referendum legalized abortion. These developments undermined the unique relationship between the church and state in the Lateran accords and emphasized the conflict between church teachings and civil legislation in a country where Catholicism was still the official religion. Because of this tension the Lateran accords were modified in 1984. The government and the Vatican negotiated a new treaty under which the Catholic church is no longer the official state religion. Furthermore, since 1990 the Catholic church has not received government funds except from taxpayer allocations (see footnote 17) for which it competes with other religious groups and state charities.¹¹

MORMONISM IN ITALY

Between the close of the Italian Mission in 1867 and the end of World War II, only scattered attempts were made by the LDS church to proselyte in Italy.¹² For the first half of the twentieth century Italy was virtually ignored. The familiar story of Vincenzo Di Francesca, who in 1910 discovered a copy of the Book of Mormon in a New York City trash can, illustrates the obscurity of Mormonism to Italians during this period. Di Francesca's copy of the Book of Mormon lacked the title page, so he did

11. Richards, 170-73.

12. These attempts were made by Italian converts returning to Italy, including Joseph Toronto, a Sicilian who had accompanied Lorenzo Snow to Italy in 1849-50, returned to his hometown of Palermo in 1876-77, and succeeded in emigrating to Utah with fourteen friends and family members. Waldensian "returnees" Jacob Rivoire, his wife Catherine Jouve, James Bertoch, and Paul Cardon all spent a number of months in the Waldensian valleys between 1879-1900. None enjoyed much success.

not know of its connection to the LDS church, even though he believed its teachings. He returned to Europe for wartime service in 1914 and eventually to Sicily after the war. In 1930 he finally discovered the connection between the book and the church and began corresponding with LDS leaders. It was not until 1951, however, forty-one years after he had first read the Book of Mormon, that church representatives finally visited Sicily and, after a three-hour interview, baptized him.¹³

Although Di Francesca's baptism had no implications for renewed church growth in Italy, several LDS servicemen's branches were organized at American military bases after World War II. In addition, Archibald Bennett of the Genealogical Society visited Europe in 1948 and obtained permission to microfilm Waldensian parish records in Piedmont. Permission was subsequently granted to microfilm records in selected Catholic parishes as well.¹⁴ Only in 1963 and 1964, however, were the first regular church units organized (which were also near U.S. military installations) making possible the organization of the Italian District of the Swiss Mission. In 1965 the church obtained permission to send missionaries to Italy, and in 1966 Elder Ezra Taft Benson presided over the rededication of the Italian mission near the same location in the Waldensian valleys where Lorenzo Snow had launched the first mission in 1850. The new mission was headquartered in Florence, and missionary zones were organized in major cities among the Catholic population. By the end of 1966 there were two Italian branches and seven servicemen's branches. Pursuant to bilateral treaties between the United States and Italy, which guaranteed certain tax advantages to U.S.-based religious organizations, the LDS church was allowed to open bank accounts and to purchase property for future construction.

As Italian government policy on church and state has evolved, the legal status of the LDS church has improved. Although the church was given permission in 1965 to reopen the Italian mission, it was not until February 1993 that its marriage ceremonies were legally recognized and it was given certain important tax benefits, including the right to inherit property through wills, trusts, estates, and other donor tax advantages.¹⁵ This latest recognition places the LDS church in company with

13. See "Pres. Bringham Baptizes First Convert in Sicily," *Deseret News*, Church Section, 28 Feb. 1951, 12-3; Don Vincent di Francesca, "Burn the Book," *The Improvement Era* 71 (May 1968): 4-7; Vincenzo di Francesca, "I Will Not Burn the Book," *Ensign* 18 (Jan. 1988): 18-21; and Vincenzo Di Francesca, "Non Brucero' Questo Libro," *La Stella*, June 1988, 14-17.

14. See Giuseppe Platone, "I Valdesi in Nord America," *La Beidana* 10 (July 1989): 71-78.

15. Three legal experts helped me understand the complicated legal relationship among the Republic of Italy, the Catholic church, and "culti acattolici": Massimo Introvigne, a lawyer, scholar, and friend of Torino, Italy; Judge Alfredo Mantovano of Lecce, Italy; and Judge Gino Fletzer of Venice, Italy, recently deceased and formerly a judge on the Corte di Cassazione (one of Italy's two highest courts).

Catholics, Waldensians, Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-Day Adventists, Assemblies of God, Baptists, Methodists, Jews, Muslims, and Buddhists, which in itself might help enhance the LDS image in Italy during the coming century.¹⁶ Other forms of recognition and benefits enjoyed by other minority religions have still not been extended to the LDS church, including eligibility for designation by taxpayers to receive a percentage of their taxes as charitable contributions.¹⁷ In addition the LDS church, unlike the Catholic church, Seventh-Day Adventists, and Jews, has not entered into agreements with the government under which a church is recognized as an independent entity negotiating directly with the government.

THE MORMON IMAGE

The image of Mormonism in Italy continues to be influenced by travel accounts, religious writers, and fiction as a church dominated by patriarchs who dress in black and practice polygamy.¹⁸ Whereas many Americans recognize that Mormonism has changed dramatically during the past 100 years, many Italians continue to imagine Mormonism in its nineteenth-century environment. They associate Mormons with Utah and polygamy or confuse it with other religions. In 1985 the notorious occultist Aleister Crowley—who lived in Sicily from 1920 until his expulsion in 1923—was identified as a Mormon because he advocated

16. Such recognition was achieved through a long, complicated process. After initial registration as a "religious corporation" in 1989, the church filed an application for official recognition. The Minister of the Interior conducted an extensive investigation in Utah and in Italy concerning the church's financial condition, its involvement in politics, and its doctrinal teachings. The church's application and the results of this investigation were approved by the Council of Ministers and signed by the president of the republic. See "Ai 10.000 mormoni riconoscimento del nostro governo," *Corriere della Sera*, 6 Feb. 1993. This approval was registered with the Court of Accounts and published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale*. Only after the approval was published in the *Gazzetta Ufficiale* did the church make its own official announcement. See "Milestone reached in Italy: Church gains legal status," *Church News*, 12 June 1993, 4.

17. The Catholic church, Seventh-Day Adventists, Assemblies of God Pentecostals, Waldensians, Methodists, and the State Charity Fund are eligible to receive .8 percent of the taxes paid by any Italian who designates them. (If a taxpayer does not make a designation, .8 percent of his or her taxes are still allocated on a pro rata basis based on the national average.) The Catholic church is the beneficiary of more than 80 percent of this designated tax revenue. Both the Seventh-Day Adventists and Assemblies of God also enjoy a favorable share of the revenue, perhaps because many nominal or disaffected Catholics prefer to designate one of these non-Catholic churches or even the State Charity Fund.

18. For a bibliography concerning the image of Mormonism in Italy, particularly during the nineteenth century, see my "The Church's Image in Italy from the 1840s to 1946: A Bibliographic Essay," *Brigham Young University Studies* 31 (Spring 1991): 83-114.

polygamy.¹⁹ More recently at least two Italian magazines have confused the Amish characters in the film *Witness* with the Latter-day Saints,²⁰ and Mormonism is frequently identified with "fundamentalist" groups which still practice polygamy.²¹ In Italy a "fundamentalist" is a "conservative" practitioner of a religious group, and a sociological survey conducted in 1990 revealed that a significant number of Italians believe that Mormons practice polygamy, wear old-fashioned clothing, dress in black, and that Mormon men have long beards while their women cover their heads with bonnets.²² Only occasionally do newspaper articles distinguish between today's fundamentalist (excommunicated) "Mormons" and their nineteenth-century forebears.²³

Even before the Italian mission was reestablished in 1966, the LDS church distributed proselyting pamphlets and a new translation of the Book of Mormon.²⁴ Responses were published by Protestant churches apprehensive that Mormonism was a serious new competitor in the already difficult terrain.²⁵ These churches were as anti-Catholic as they were anti-

19. See Pietro Saja, "Aleister Crowley e il suo soggiorno a Cefalù," *Il Corriere della Madonie*, Oct. 1985, 6. For a description of Crowley's residence in Cefalù, see John Symonds, *The Great Beast: The Life of Aleister Crowley* (London: Rider and Co., 1951), 149-215. For information concerning Crowley's attitude toward Mormonism, see Massimo Introvigne, "The Beast and the Prophet: Aleister Crowley's Fascination for Joseph Smith," delivered at the Mormon History Association, Claremont, California, 31 May 1991.

20. See "L'Animismo e le sette minori," *Oggi* 15 (1988): 188-89; and Robert Walsh, "Mormoni variazioni sullo stesso tema," *La Presenza Cristiana* 36 (10 Nov. 1988): 27-8.

21. On 26 July 1991 one of Italy's largest newspapers published an article about Alex Joseph which claimed that "the Mormons in Utah—but not all—are among the fortunate religions" which allow men to have more than one wife. See "L'Harem di Papa Joseph," *Il Venerdì di Repubblica* 181 (26 July 1991): 39-42.

22. See Luigi Berzano and Massimo Introvigne, *La sfida infinita, La nuova religiosità nella Sicilia centrale* (Caltanissetta-Roma: Salvatore Sciascia Editore, 1994), 198.

23. See Giuseppe Josca, "Il sindaco da l'esempio: 5 moglie e 60 figli," *Corriere della Sera*, 25 Sept. 1986, 3.

24. Extracts from the "History of Joseph Smith" were translated and published after World War II. See *Il Profeta Giuseppe Smith Racconta La Sua Propria Storia* (n.p., n.d.). A new translation of the Book of Mormon was distributed by the European mission in 1964. See *Il Libro di Mormon* (Basilica, Svizzera: Missione Europea, 1964).

25. See Ermanno Rostan, *Chi sono i Mormoni* (Torino: Editrice Claudiana, 1974). (On 4 February 1965 Rostan, in his capacity as Moderator of the Waldensian Church in Italy, had visited Salt Lake City and participated in a program with Elder Marion D. Hanks, of the LDS First Council of Seventy, "to make some friends for the Waldensian Church.") A more recent Waldensian response is Giorgio Bouchard, *Chiese e movimenti evangelici del nostro tempo* (Torino: Editrice Claudiana, 1992). The earliest evangelical responses were translations of polemics published in the United States. See Walter Martin, *I Mormoni* (Napoli: Centro Biblico, 1966); and Truman Scott, *Il Mormonismo ed il Vangelo* (Genova: Editrice Lanterna, 1972). Italians and other Europeans also joined the fray: Silvio Caddeo, *Gli equivoci storici e archeologici del libro di Mormon* (Genova: Editrice Lanterna, 1967) (Evangelical); and Tommaso Heinze, *Risposte ai miei amici Mormoni* (Napoli: Centro Biblico, 1984) (Evangelical).

Mormon. However, beginning in the 1980s, after Mormon membership had grown to approximately 10,000, two Catholic priests, Nicola Tornese and Pier Angelo Gramaglia, wrote polemical anti-Mormon works which are still in print.²⁶ They were joined in 1987 by a conservative Catholic counter-cult organization, Gruppo di Ricerca e di Informazione sulle Sette (G.R.I.S.), which has organized conferences and published materials attacking various new religious movements in Italy, including Mormonism.²⁷ Much of this material parrots articles published in English.

Historically many Italian journalists reporting about the LDS church have relied on negative material which places all Mormons in a nineteenth-century context when supposedly "all" Mormons practiced polygamy. The journalist who reported in February 1993 that the Council of Ministers had approved the LDS application for government recognition emphasized that "Mormons do not like to talk about the old practice of polygamy which was abolished in 1890," and that "there are those who say they [the Mormons] are racists and are prejudiced against women."²⁸ Other journalists have been even more misinformed. In 1991, in the wake of the "cold fusion" controversy at the University of Utah, one Italian newspaper headlined a story, "Pons, a swindler like all Mormons,"²⁹ without noting (or perhaps realizing) that Pons is not LDS. The headline was simply a "soundbite" from a statement made by an Italian Olympic official who was competing with Salt Lake City for the 1998 Olympics.

26. See Nicola Tornese, *Le origini: Joseph Smith e le sue visioni* (Napoli, Capella Cangiani-Marigliano: Istituto Anselmi, 1980); Nicola Tornese, *L'uomo e il suo destino* (Napoli, Capella Cangiani-Marigliano: Istituto Anselmi, 1981); Nicola Tornese, *Il concetto di Dio secondo i Mormoni* (Napoli, Capella Cangiani-Marigliano: Istituto Anselmi, 1983); Pier Angelo Gramaglia, *Confronto con i Mormoni* (Casale Monferrato: Piemme, 1985).

27. On G.R.I.S. and the difference between "counter-cult" and "anti-cult" movements in Italy, see Massimo Introvigne, "Anti-Cult and Counter-Cult Movements in Italy," in Anson Shupe and David Bromley, eds., *Anti-Cult Movements in Cross-Cultural Perspective* (New York: Garland, 1994), 171-97. For a sampling of G.R.I.S. publications concerning Mormonism, see Robert Walsh, "I Mormoni," *I nuovi movimenti religiosi non cattolici in Italia* (Leumann [Torino]: Editrice Elle Di Ci, 1987), 49-66; Mirella Lorenzini, "Il millenarismo dei Mormoni," *Sette e Religioni* 1 (Jan.-Mar. 1991): 69-82; Robert Walsh, "Il Libro di Mormon: opera di Dio o dell'uomo?" *Sette e Religioni* 11 (July-Sept. 1993): 34-48; Mirella Lorenzini, "Il mondo degli spiriti nella dottrina dei Mormoni," *Sette e Religioni* 11 (July-Sept. 1993): 49-78; Alain Bouchard, "L'evoluzione eterna. Panorama delle dottrine dei Mormoni," *Sette e Religioni* 11 (July-Sept. 1993): 79-88; Paolo Blandini, *Mormoni in Cammino* (Caltanissetta: presso l'autore, 1992) (the author notes on the title page that he is a member of G.R.I.S.); Jerry and Dianna Benson, *Testimonianza per i Mormoni* (Caltanissetta: G.R.I.S., 1992). Although the Bensons are Evangelical anti-Mormons, their pamphlet was published by a branch of G.R.I.S., whose membership is largely Catholic. Mormonism has been particularly controversial in Caltanissetta because of Blandini and G.R.I.S. See, e.g., letters to the editor, *Cammino*, 26 Jan. and 2, 6, and 9 Feb. 1992.

28. *Corriere della Sera*, 6 Feb. 1993, 15.

29. *Il Giorno*, 11 Nov. 1991, 5. A more balanced article was published in *Il Nostro Tempo*, 22 Mar. 1992, 9.

Four years later, when Salt Lake City was awarded the 2002 Olympics, the Italian press failed to note that Utah's delegation was led by two non-Mormons. Other articles, including those reporting the Mark Hofmann affair, adopted a similarly melodramatic tone.³⁰

While one-dimensional, stereotypical, anti-Mormon articles continue to be written, a "budding" of responsible comment concerning Mormonism has also commenced in Italy.³¹ Massimo Introvigne and his Center for Studies on New Religions (CESNUR) have been at the forefront of this development. One Catholic scholar recently observed that Introvigne is one of several Catholics who will likely "influence future official Catholic documents on the NRMs [new religious movements]" and that he "does not indulge in the kind of negative and belligerent reactions that have so often characterized Christian responses to the new religions."³² Introvigne has presented and published numerous papers about the LDS church and is the author of the only book on Mormonism published by the Vatican Press.³³ The French edition³⁴ was favorably reviewed in both the *Journal of Mormon History*³⁵ and *Brigham Young University Studies*.³⁶ In 1994 he responded to an article in *La Civiltà Cattolica* which criticized Mormon doctrines that the same journal had praised in 1860.³⁷ Introvigne's response was published in *Cristianità*, a monthly magazine of Alleanza Cattolica, a conservative Catholic lay organization. Introvigne identified *La Civiltà Cattolica's* most obvious inaccuracies and documented a diatribe of Pier Angelo Gramaglia,³⁸ even though more responsible descriptions of Mormonism were available in Italian.

The Mormon image in Italy has improved and will continue to im-

30. See Alberto Pasolini Zanelli, "Il Caso della Salamandra assassina," *Il Giorno*, 14 Sept. 1986, 3.

31. See also my "The Budding of Mormon History of Italy," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 25 (Spring 1992): 174-76.

32. See John Saliba, "Official Catholic Responses to the New Religions," in Shupe and Bromley, 204-205.

33. Massimo Introvigne, *I Mormoni* (Schio [Vicenza]: Interlogos/ Città del Vaticano: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 1993). Introvigne's articles in French and Italian are set forth in bibliographies contained in *Les Mormons* and *I Mormoni*. He has also published in *Dialogue*, *Sunstone*, and the *John Whitmer Historical Association Journal*.

34. Massimo Introvigne, *Les Mormons* (Turnhout, Belgium: Editions Brepols, 1991).

35. Davis Bitton, "Review of *Les Mormons*," *Journal of Mormon History* 19 (Fall 1993): 141-44.

36. Michael D. Bush, "Brief Notices," *Brigham Young University Studies* 33 (1993): 366-67.

37. See "I Mormoni. Chi sono? In che cosa credono?" *La Civiltà Cattolica*, 16 July 1994, 107-20.

38. See Massimo Introvigne, "'La Civiltà Cattolica e i Mormoni,'" *Cristianità* 234 (Oct. 1994): 17-27. For a short description of this episode, see my "La Civiltà Cattolica Revisits Mormonism," *Sunstone* 17 (Dec. 1994): 84.

prove in the twenty-first century because of CESNUR, Introvigne, and press stories which rely on them. The Italian press is beginning to consult scholarly material rather than rely solely on anti-Mormon, or at least badly-informed, authors. In addition more journalists have visited Utah or, more importantly, have encountered and interviewed Mormons in Italy. Balanced descriptions of LDS temple work for the dead, genealogical program, and Family History Library have recently appeared in the Italian press.³⁹

MORMON IDENTITY

Many Italians might continue to identify Mormons as old-fashioned cowboys who live in Utah and spend their evenings with multiple wives. However, the Italian membership, although not uninformed about Mormon history, regards with disdain press stories which emphasize this distorted image. Most LDS converts in Italy are former Catholics. Some were anti-Catholic and were particularly attracted by teachings concerning an apostasy. A few Italians have become more anti-Catholic after joining the LDS church because of organizations such as G.R.I.S. and Catholic priests such as Tornese and Gramaglia. To some extent most converts to non-Catholic churches in Italy are "anti-Catholic." Because of this, some LDS converts find it difficult to understand recent statements by general authorities which compliment the Pope and the Catholic church.⁴⁰

In contrast, a 1976 study by a Catholic priest and professor at Palermo Theological University concluded that Mormons in Sicily were less anti-Catholic than Jehovah's Witnesses or Assembly of God Pentecostals.⁴¹ Although no surveys concerning the social composition of Italian Mormons (on a national basis) have been published, the conclusions of the 1976 survey have been reconfirmed by sociologists Massimo Introvigne and Luigi Berzano in a recently published book which compares Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Assemblies of God in Sicily.⁴² Although the survey conducted for Introvigne's and Berzano's book may not justify sweeping generalizations about Mormons in Italy (there are few Mormons living in central Sicily where the survey was conducted), the authors concluded that Mormon converts in Italy are of an average

39. See Roberto Beretta, "Nella caverna degli Antenati," *Avvenire*, 6 July 1995, 21; Michele Straniero, "Il Duce e un papa fatti mormoni," *La Stampa*, 23 Dec. 1991, 14; and Gianni Riotta, "Ho visitato l'anagrafe del mondo," *Corriere della Sera*, 14 July 1991, 7.

40. See Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Great and Abominable? LDS Now See Catholic Church in a New Light," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 Nov. 1993, C1-C2. See also *Ensign* 23 (Nov. 1993): 18-20.

41. Cataldo Naro, "Tre fasi e tre forme di dissenso religioso nella storia contemporanea del nisseno," *Argomenti* 2 (Apr.-June 1976): 5-15.

42. Introvigne and Berzano, 198-203. Introvigne's *I Mormoni* also contains some sociological comments, 192-97.

higher social status than either Jehovah's Witnesses or Assemblies of God Pentecostal, and that there is continuity between traditional Sicilian values (family, traditional morality, and patriarchy) and certain Mormon practices and teachings. In general, Sicilian converts have simply become dissatisfied with Catholicism and have found in Mormonism a new religious experience without the same type of radical cultural discontinuity required by other new religious movements. Thus, even if they are dissatisfied with the Catholic church, LDS converts are more reluctant to engage in the type of radical anti-Catholic rhetoric (written and verbal) more typical of Jehovah's Witnesses.

The LDS church recognizes "cultural continuity" and does not require members to totally "discard their religious heritage and adopt a new one."⁴³ This has reduced, to some extent, the "tension" normally created when a new religious movement challenges a predominant religion. Catholicism is much more than a church. It is headquartered in its own sovereign state and for many Italians represents a kind of continuity with the ancient Roman Empire. Most Italians, believers and non-believers, take pride in the worldwide presence and influence of a church so closely identified with Italy. Until recently Italian politics were dominated by the church party (the Christian Democrats) which continued the trend of combining politics and religion. Thus when people leave the Catholic church, they leave behind part of their cultural heritage. This is one of the reasons that non-Catholic missionaries have had, and continue to have, difficulty finding converts in Italy even among the majority of Catholics who are only "cultural" members. Although 97 percent of all Italians are baptized Catholics, only about 31 percent regularly attend Mass or consider themselves practicing Catholics.⁴⁴ While the latter percentage might seem low, it is the highest in Europe except for Ireland. Proportionally, there are three times more practicing Catholics in Italy than there are in France.⁴⁵ Some converts are initially attracted to Mormonism because it is an American church, an echo from the nineteenth-century mission when some converts saw the church as a ticket to the "promised land." Yet as a general rule, even though Italians are not generally anti-American, they are bound to Italian customs and history and are more likely to join an international church which has some continuity with their customs and culture (some Italian converts have jokingly noted that eight of the fifteen books in the Book of Mormon end in vowels!). Furthermore, a church in

43. Rodney Stark, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," in David G. Bromley and Phillip E. Hammond, *The Future of New Religious Movements* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1987), 13.

44. Franco Garelli, *Religione e Chiesa in Italia* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1991).

45. See Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, *La Religione degli Europei* (Torino: Edizione della Fondazione Giovanni Agnelli, 1992).

which Italian members participate significantly will be more attractive than an American church totally dependent on a hierarchy in the United States or whose growth depends on the proselyting efforts of American missionaries.

Many characteristics of the LDS church have Catholic counterparts. Italian Catholics are family-oriented, patriarchal, and conservative. Official teachings about family values, divorce, and abortion are similar in the two churches. The church community plays a central part in the lives of both Catholics and LDS members. Most LDS converts continue to share these values, even if they have become alienated from the Catholic church itself. Perhaps they have become lost in the majority church and prefer to participate in an organization that is smaller and in many ways less complicated.⁴⁶ Although there are many Catholic lay organizations, especially after Vatican II, Mormonism provides a more direct mechanism through which lay members can participate in local church government and at the same time rely on a hierarchy similar to that in Catholicism for governing members.⁴⁷

If such "cultural continuity" exists, one may ask why Catholics, particularly those who have not become rabidly anti-Catholic, do not remain in Catholicism, since similar values are emphasized in both religions. The Introvigne and Berzano survey of central Sicily (and other sociological studies of Italian Catholicism) might offer one possible explanation (beyond the spiritual process of conversion itself): After Vatican II many conservative Italians living in liberal parishes no longer believe that the Catholic church is a safe harbor for traditional values. In Sicily many prominent members of the clergy are active in politics and openly advance a liberal social agenda. This agenda has been interpreted by many Sicilians as a breach of traditional values. Belgian sociologist Johann Leman concluded in the 1970s that Catholics were upset with priests who were too modern or were not staunch supporters of traditional family values; and for that reason lower-class Sicilian immigrants in Belgium, as well as peasants in Sicily, began converting in large numbers to the Jehovah's Witnesses.⁴⁸ Similar attitudes might account for the curiosity some middle-class Italians have about Mormonism, with its emphasis on traditional family values. In a somewhat different way similarities might also explain why there are fewer converts to Mormonism than to Jehovah's Witnesses or Pentecostals. Mormonism lacks the strident, anti-Catholic

46. See Eileen Barker, *New Religious Movements: A Practical Introduction* (London: Her Majesty's Stationary Office, 1989), 11-13.

47. Stark, 16-17.

48. Johann Leman, *From Challenging Culture to Challenged Culture: The Sicilian Cultural Code and the Socio-Cultural Praxis of Sicilian Immigrants in Belgium* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1987).

tone of its competitors and does not require a complete, total denunciation of one's former faith, which somewhat neutralizes its appeal to truly alienated Catholics. Although Pope John Paul II has attempted to reemphasize traditional values, the local clergy, which was educated in the aftermath of Vatican II and is still politically active, continues to have a negative influence on Catholics who are alienated, or are becoming alienated, from the church. All of the Pope's efforts will not prevent a portion of these alienated segments from converting to new religions, such as Mormonism, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Assemblies of God Pentecostals, which emphasize conservative social and sexual ethics.

Because of their small numbers and closer links to church leadership, LDS converts willingly commit themselves to sacrifices that are not required by many other competing religions. Part of Mormonism's appeal in Italy, particularly for the middle class, is its elitism. Mormonism's small community heightens the sense that members enjoy a particular enlightenment about "ancient mysteries," a feeling reenforced through temple rituals. Although the law of tithing and the Word of Wisdom may be stumbling blocks for some investigators, they are acceptable sacrifices for those who are attracted by this special knowledge. Nevertheless, in Italy, where *espresso* and *vino* are like the "Big Gulp" in the United States, and where middle-class workers are taxed at higher rates than their American counterparts, these sacrifices are not insignificant. As health consciousness increases and the Italian economy improves, these types of impediments might become less formidable handicaps in Mormon proselyting efforts, particularly as the image of Mormonism in Italy improves.

THE COMPETITION

Even though Mormonism was among the first non-Catholic churches to dispatch missionaries to Italy in the nineteenth century, it recalled them too early to reap any significant benefit from the anti-clericalism which permeated the Kingdom of Italy from the Risorgimento (when the anti-Catholic element of Mormonism was given more emphasis)⁴⁹ until the Lateran Treaty in 1929 (when the growth of non-Catholic churches in Italy stalled until after World War II). During this period anti-clericalism provided an important catalyst for the growth of Baptist churches and

49. See Orson Pratt's references to the Catholic church published in *The Seer* 1 (Dec. 1853): 177-78, and 2 (Jan. 1854): 204-205. These and other statements were used to poke fun at Protestant churches because they were the "offspring" of the Catholic church which they called "the Mother of Harlots." See my "Some Thoughts about Mormon Attitudes and Teachings about the Roman Catholic Church, 1830-1990," delivered at the Mormon History Association, 15 May 1992.

congregations of Brethren,⁵⁰ and eventually contributed to the explosion of conversions to Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, and other Pentecostals. With the exception of Jehovah's Witnesses and the Assemblies of God (which began proselyting in Italy only in 1908), all of these Protestant religions established missions in Italy during the nineteenth century but, unlike Mormonism, remained for the next 100 years.

Mormon missionaries returned too late to participate in the conversion boom which occurred as Italians returned to their homeland after World War II. Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal groups benefited from Italian Americans who converted in the United States before returning to Italy to retire. Jehovah's Witnesses profited from converts returning from Belgium, where many Italians had emigrated at the beginning of the century to work in mines.⁵¹ The most successful non-Catholic religions in Italy began through the conversion of friends and relatives of returning converts, who had achieved enhanced status and became eloquent spokespeople for previously "foreign" new religions. Italian sociologists have compared the limited success of Protestant missionaries in the nineteenth century, who had little in common with the working classes, with the greater success achieved by the "churches of the returnees," which had blue-collar roots.

Joseph Toronto's return to his hometown of Palermo for one and a half years between 1876-77, and his subsequent return to Utah with four-teen friends and relatives, is a unique example of this network phenomenon in the nineteenth-century Mormon mission. It failed to bear any fruit in Italy because of the Mormon practice of "gathering." Mormon converts moved to America and seldom returned. Although Di Francesca's return to Italy after his "conversion" is a twentieth-century example, it also failed to bear fruit because there was no church organization in Italy; no one in Italy could baptize him, and he apparently did not convert any relatives or friends. James B. Allen has perceptively observed that the American military presence in Italy "helped pave the way for the introduction of Mormonism."⁵² Although Allen also acknowledged that a few Italian workers, converted in Switzerland and Germany, returned to their homeland in the 1960s where they "helped lay the foundation for the growth of the Church in Italy itself,"⁵³ these Mormon returnees were ex-

50. The most highly acclaimed book concerning the impact of the Risorgimento on Protestant churches in Italy is by Waldensian scholar Giorgio Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti* (Milano: Il Saggiatore, 1989). Mormonism is briefly mentioned on p. 425n3. Protestants in Italy—even after the Risorgimento—are also described by Catholic writer Camillo Crivelli in *I Protestanti in Italia* (Isola del Livi: Macioce e Pisani, 1936).

51. See Leman.

52. James B. Allen, "On Becoming a Universal Church: Some Historical Perspectives," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 25 (Spring 1992): 21.

53. *Ibid.*, 22.

ceptions rather than the rule. Just as Catholicism was “shaped and nurtured in the bosom of the Roman Empire,” the doctrines of Mormonism have been introduced in Italy with a “strongly American cast—especially Western American.”⁵⁴ Mormons who joined (or were drafted into) the American military were initially responsible for the reorganization of Mormon branches in Italy; other young, short-haired American representatives expanded the foundations of the church by proselyting (on a full-time basis) disenfranchised Catholics in the urban centers of Italy.

In contrast, returnees who converted to other denominations were Italian natives who came in larger numbers and were keenly aware of the existence and success of non-Catholic churches outside of Italy. Many Italians converted to Jehovah’s Witnesses, Assemblies of God, and other Pentecostals, and then returned to Italy, before the Mormon church organized its first branch. These returnees remained in Italy and proselyted on behalf of their new faith in the cities of their birth. Perhaps the sacrifices required of Jehovah Witnesses (twelve hours of proselyting each week) have been more conducive to growth than have the sacrifices required of Mormons. By 1995 there were over 400,000 Jehovah’s Witnesses in Italy; over 200,000 members of the Assemblies of God; and at least another 200,000 other Pentecostals. At the same time there are still only 25,000 Waldensians (approximately the same number as in 1850) and another 20,000 members of the Evangelical Federation in which Waldensians, Methodists, and Baptists participate; approximately 16,000 Mormons; 13,000 Brethren; and 8,000 Seventh-Day Adventists. Although these are the most successful Christian churches in Italy, there are approximately 14,000 members of Soka Gakkai, whose most famous member is Italian soccer star Roberto Baggio, and another 9,000 other Buddhists. At the same time the number of Muslims in Italy is exploding because of illegal immigration from northern Africa. It is estimated that there may be a million Muslims, and the first Mosque (Islamic Cultural Center) was recently completed in Rome. This influx of Muslims has forced Italian society, and its courts, to confront their attitudes toward polygamy and to reconsider the constitutionality of anti-bigamy laws in effect since the Napoleonic occupation.⁵⁵

Despite the LDS church’s withdrawal from Italy for more than 100

54. Armand L. Mauss, *The Angel and the Beehive: The Mormon Struggle with Assimilation* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 204.

55. Anti-bigamy laws were applicable in Italy during the Napoleonic occupation and others were enacted after the restoration. See *Codice Penale per gli stati di S. M. il Re di Sardegna* (Torino: Stamperia Reale, 1839), §§ 522-29. Under current Italian law bigamy is a crime, punishable by from one to five years, which may be augmented if the guilty party—usually the husband—has deceived the second spouse. See *Codice Penale*, § 556 (Piacenza: Casa Editrice La Tribuna, 1980).

years, the number of Mormons in Italy is comparable with those in other European countries where Mormon missionaries have proselyted for longer periods of time. Italian membership is about half that of Germany (36,000) and two-thirds that of France (25,000). It can also be compared with membership in Spain (25,000), where missionaries began proselyting about the same time. Italy has double or triple the membership of countries which, in some cases, were more successful mission fields in the nineteenth century, including Switzerland (6,700); Denmark (4,400); Norway (4,000); Sweden (8,300); and Austria (3,400). Only the United Kingdom, which shares many traditions and a common language with the United States (and where a contingent of American missionaries has been since 1837) has a significantly larger membership (167,000). These numbers are all relatively small, however, and suggest a common thread which might explain Mormonism's relatively slow growth throughout Europe. As we enter the twenty-first century, we should perhaps reconsider whether the church's small membership, and the fact that 85 percent of all Mormons live in the Americas, is related to its unchanged nineteenth-century image and to its American connection (both historical and theological), which can both attract and repel potential investigators.

THE FUTURE

Although the image of the LDS church in Italy has improved, it is unlikely that there will be significant increase in convert baptisms unless the church undertakes a more aggressive public exposure campaign, as it has done in the United States. The church's image in Europe and elsewhere would benefit by mass media campaigns emphasizing Mormonism's twentieth-century culture, its Christian roots, and its humanitarian activities (particularly those done in conjunction with Catholic and Protestant relief organizations in former Italian colonies such as Somalia). The commitment of significant financial resources for public relations would not only enhance the church's emerging image but also provide missionaries with more informed investigators. It could have a greater impact than doubling the number of foreign missionaries. The church, however, will be identified with Italy (rather than with America) only if such a campaign is reinforced by local Mormons. One factor in whether the church eventually becomes international in image and influence will be if Italians ever recognize that there are influential Mormons in Italy.

As the LDS church in Italy becomes more indigenous, with Italian members, missionaries, and leaders who do not necessarily depend on American thinking on subjects beyond the fundamentals of Mormonism, the local members will become more visible. Travel accounts from Utah, even if more evenhanded lately, do not necessarily reinforce the image of

an international church, which includes socially-conservative, middle-class Italians. The image of Mormonism will facilitate church growth as it becomes the image of the man (and his family) in the street, not the man (and his wives) living across the ocean.

Even in the twentieth century some of the best and brightest Italian converts have emigrated to Utah, in part because of their attraction to the American lifestyle and customs. Few of those who leave ever return to Italy. Although a strong core has remained in Italy to build Zion, one Mormon sociologist has correctly observed that the church has not yet reared "a full second generation" of Mormon adults outside the United States.⁵⁶ The level of church growth in the twenty-first century will depend on these second-generation Mormon "returnees." The Mormon church no longer depends on servicemen's branches for its life blood in Italy. If the church successfully acquires a critical mass of membership, including a second generation which can support a complete church structure, the church is likely to enjoy more significant growth in the twenty-first century. But such growth could be undermined by church programs designed to simplify, economize, and adapt to the rapidly increasing church membership in North and South America. Italian participation in making decisions not affecting basic truth claims—that is, in matters like church architecture, translation, and public relations⁵⁷—could increase the sense of community among members and identify the church as "Italian" to those encountering it for the first time.

Since Mormonism is less anti-Catholic than are Jehovah's Witnesses, Assemblies of God, and other Pentecostals, it has been less successful in attracting those segments of society most alienated from the Catholic church. Yet the Mormon missionary program can find success with the more moderate segments of society. At the same time the Catholic church will continue to resist all efforts to proselyte any of its members. Although no longer the official religion of Italy, and no longer comprising a

56. Mauss, 204-205.

57. On church architecture, see Martha Sonntag Bradley, "The Cloning of Mormon Architecture," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 14 (Spring 1981): 20-31; and "The Mormon Steeple: A Symbol of What?" *Sunstone* 16 (Sept. 1992): 39-48. Although church architecture has not retarded church growth in the Americas, where "uniformity of design and concept helped to unify different styles and peoples" ("Cloning," 30; "Mormon Steeple," 46), resistance to such standardization, particularly with American concepts and designs, may only reinforce the image of Mormonism as an American church, and may unintentionally undercut efforts to establish the church's bona fides among Italians—and other Europeans—who are attracted by many of Mormonism's doctrines, principles, and practices but are not enamored by its American architecture or political orientation. These American features are sometimes reenforced by American missionaries, standardized discussions, tracts, and church magazines and manuals, which—particularly when they are poorly translated from speeches delivered in Salt Lake City—remind listeners that the message originates in the United States.

monolithic voting bloc, the Catholic church still has an important impact on many Italians and on how they react to Mormonism and other new religious movements. The Pope, even a non-Italian one, will continue to influence the political and religious climate in Italy.⁵⁸ Within the past ten years the Italian press has reported that the Pope criticized Jehovah's Witnesses, Seventh-day Adventists, and Mormons because they are "religious sects which are not open to dialogue and are harmful to ecumenism."⁵⁹ Catholic scholars have also suggested that Mormon proselytism is a major stumbling block to establishing good relations between Catholics and Mormons on an international scale.⁶⁰ Any dialogue, official or unofficial, would increase Italian understanding of Mormonism and its Italian members.

Despite these criticisms, and similar statements by Mormon officials,⁶¹ improved relations between Mormons and Catholics have already begun. A spirit of cooperation, if not regular dialogue, between Salt Lake City and the Vatican has been reflected in similar religious orientations, and in their social and political agendas. Italian journalist Michele L. Straniero reported in 1992 that Mormons were "officially" invited to participate, with other religious groups, in an ecumenical alliance organized by the Vatican against pornography. He noted that this invitation and

58. Richards, 126.

59. *Corriere della Sera*, 7 Feb. 1985, 4. The Pope was also quoted in 1990 that there are false prophets in new religions which take advantage of the disorientation of immigrants (especially in Latin America). Other church officials have similarly complained that some NRMs disseminate confusion among the faithful but that their ultimate success depends more on the indifference of Catholics than on the message of the new religion. See John Paul II, "Una sapiente azione pastorale per salvaguardare i migranti del proselitismo religioso," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 30 Aug. 1990, 6; and "La Chiesa é chiamata ad illuminare secondo il vangelo tutti i campi della vita dell'uomo e della società," *L'Osservatore Romano*, 17 May 1990, 22-23.

60. See John Saliba, "Mormonism in the Twenty-first Century," *Studia Missionalia* 41 (1992): 49-67; and *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 Nov. 1993, C2.

61. The "Great Apostasy" is a central theme in Joseph Smith's narrative and will continue to be taught. The *Encyclopedia of Mormonism* emphasizes doctrinal differences rather than similarities in social and political outlooks in "Catholicism and Mormonism." More recent discourses by general authorities on the "Great Apostasy," "postbiblical creeds," "lesser light," "philosophical abstraction," and "traditional Christianity" are directed as a "condemnation of the creeds, not of the faithful seekers who believed in them" and are admittedly "undiplomatic" but are consistent with long-accepted LDS teachings. A recent discourse by a Mormon apostle on the apostasy was criticized by Catholic clergy and ministers of other faiths. See Dallin H. Oaks, "Apostasy and Restoration," *Ensign* 25 (May 1995): 84-86; Oaks, "Apostasia e restaurazione," *La Stella*, July 1995, 98-101; and Kristen Moulton, "Oaks' Talk on Trinity is Criticized, Ministers of other Faiths take offense at portrayal, Apostle's Trinity talk offends others," *Salt Lake Tribune*, 8 Apr. 1995, E3. For an example of a Catholic response to the current teachings by fundamentalist Christians concerning the Catholic church, including arguments concerning early church history, see Karl Keating, *Catholicism and Fundamentalism: The Attack on "Romanism" by "Bible Christians"* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988).

subsequent participation were unique, because of Mormonism's traditional exegesis concerning Catholic history.⁶² It has also been reported that President Gordon B. Hinckley was "warmly received at the Vatican archives [in 1992] when he presented a set of the five-volume *Encyclopedia of Mormonism*."⁶³

Even if Mormonism in Italy continues to grow slowly, many of the changes of the last thirty years have created an environment favorable to a new stage of assimilation. The increasingly friendly official relations between Mormons and Catholics, their shared values, the official recognition and improved image of the LDS church, the secularization of the Italian government, and increasing religious pluralism have all created an environment in which Mormonism is no longer considered by the well informed as a weird "sect" or "cult." In the twenty-first century Mormonism has a unique opportunity to enter a second phase in which it is no longer considered a threat to Italian society. Societal and family pressures associated with joining "new religious movements" often dissipate as knowledge replaces fear.⁶⁴ Even Catholic renewal might facilitate understanding between Mormons and Catholics, because such renewal emphasizes many of the characteristics and practices which form the basis for some "cultural continuity" between Mormonism and Catholicism.⁶⁵ Such a transition could broaden the base of those whose curiosity might result in conversion. Presumably the membership profile would broaden from those who are favorably disposed toward Americans, marginal to their own environment, and alienated from their own religion, to a profile comprising those who are integrated into upper-middle-class society, not afraid to challenge traditional American social and political thinking, and in background cultural Catholics nonetheless attracted by the community life and lifestyles of their Mormon friends.⁶⁶

In his best-selling book, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope*, Pope John Paul II wrote that "the number of people who participate in religious ceremonies" is not a definitive measure of faith or a determinant of the future of a religious movement. As the world approaches the twenty-first century, he believes: "Truly, there are no grounds for losing hope. If the world is not Catholic from a denominational point of view, it is nonetheless profoundly permeated by the Gospel."⁶⁷ In Italy one might also conclude

62. Michele L. Straniero, "Nella crociata, anche coi mormoni," *La Stampa*, 6 Feb. 1992.

63. See statement of LDS church spokesman Don LeFevre in *Salt Lake Tribune*, 20 Nov. 1993, C1.

64. Barker, 93-98.

65. See, e.g., Rodney Stark, "How New Religions Succeed: A Theoretical Model," in Bromley and Hammond, 11-29.

66. See Mauss, 213n1, on the "social availability" of potential converts.

67. John Paul II, *Crossing the Threshold of Hope* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1994), 102, 112.

that while Mormonism remains a small minority religion, the current political and religious climates favor increased understanding; and that since Mormonism is also “permeated by the Gospel,” it will continue to grow.