

FIGURE 1. Map showing the location of Torre Pellice, the site of dedicatory prayers by Lorenzo Snow (in 1850) and Ezra Taft Benson (in 1966).

The LDS Church in Italy

The 1966 Rededication by Elder Ezra Taft Benson

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From the early years of Mormon history, Italy attracted the attention of the Church's leadership as a proselyting field. In April 1849, less than two years after the arrival of the first pioneer companies in Salt Lake Valley, President Brigham Young announced plans to open missionary work in non-English speaking countries, and by October of that year the first group of missionaries left the Utah territory bound for continental Europe with the charge to begin preaching in Italy, France, and Denmark. Thus, midway through the "century of missions" (as the nineteenth century has been called), The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints became one of the first religions of the modern era to begin actively proselyting on Italian soil.¹

Upon their arrival in Torre Pellice (figs. 1 through 5), located in present-day northwestern Italy, in July 1850, Apostle Lorenzo Snow and his

1. K. S. Latourette, quoted in A. F. Walls, "World Christianity, the Missionary Movement, and the Ugly American," in *World Order and Religion*, ed. Wade Clark Roof (Albany, N.Y.: SUNY, 1991), 149. English Methodists began missionary work in Italy in 1859, English Baptists in 1863, American Methodists in 1872, and the Salvation Army in 1887. See material on Protestantism in Italy in Hans J. Hillerbrand, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Protestantism*, vol. 2 (New York: Routledge, 2004), 962–63.



FIGURE 2. A view of Torre Pellice, Italy, including in the distance Monte Vandalino (the high mountain) and Monte Castelluzzo (the outcropping), June 4, 1889. From Carlo Papini, *Come vivevano . . . Val Pellice, Valli d'Angrogna e di Luserna: fin de siècle (1870–1910)* (Torino: Claudiana Editrice, 1998).



FIGURE 3. Another view of Torre Pellice, taken April 22, 1908. From Carlo Papini, *Come vivevano . . . Val Pellice, Valli d'Angrogna e di Luserna: fin de siècle (1870–1910)* (Torino: Claudiana Editrice, 1998).



FIGURE 4. A neighborhood piazza in Torre Pellice, Italy. Courtesy James Toronto.

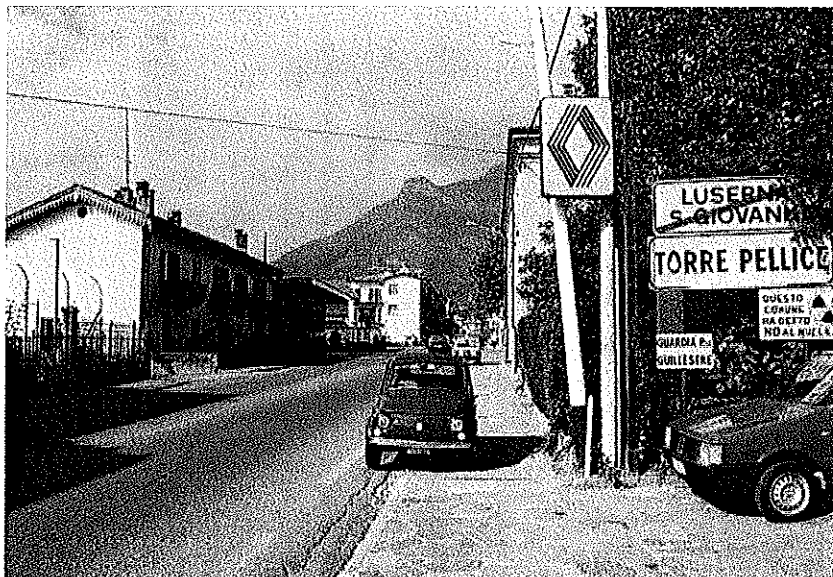


FIGURE 5. The main road through Torre Pellice, Italy, circa 2000. Courtesy James Toronto.

companions, Joseph Toronto² and Thomas (T. B. H.) Stenhouse,³ rented a room in the Albergo dell'Orso, a hotel located in the town's central piazza. Once settled, the missionaries began to consider how best to go about the daunting task of introducing a new faith to a Protestant religious community, the Waldensians (fig. 6), whose devotion to their traditions had been forged by seven hundred years of persecution and isolation. Initially, the missionaries felt that it was "the mind of the Spirit" to proceed "by slow and cautious steps," probably a result of their growing awareness of the religious restrictions imposed by the Sardinian government, including a ban on public preaching, selling Bibles, or publishing works that attack Catholicism. Snow later reported that their low-key approach had been successful in keeping them "from being entangled in the meshes of the law" and that "all the jealous policy of Italy has been hushed into repose by the comparative silence" of the missionaries' activities. "At the same time," he pointed out, the three elders kept busy, "always engaged in forming some new acquaintance, or breaking down some ancient barrier of prejudice."⁴

A priesthood blessing administered by Snow to Joseph Guy (the three-year-old son of their hotel's managers, Jean Pierre Guy and Henriette Coucourde) and the boy's remarkable recovery emboldened the missionaries and helped set the stage for a significant change in strategy.⁵ About the time of the blessing, Snow, having concluded that circumstances were "as favourable as could be expected," decided to send for Jabez Woodard,⁶ whom

2. Toronto, whose Italian name is Giuseppe Taranto, was a native of Palermo, Sicily, who joined the LDS Church in Boston in 1843 and emigrated to Nauvoo. In October 1849 he was called by Brigham Young to accompany Snow on a mission to Italy. See James A. Toronto, "Giuseppe Efsio Taranto: Odyssey from Sicily to Salt Lake City," in *Pioneers in Every Land: Inspirational Stories of International Pioneers Past and Present*, ed. Bruce A. Van Orden, D. Brent Smith, and Everett Smith Jr. (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1997), 125–47.

3. Originally from Scotland, Stenhouse was president of the Southampton Conference in England when Snow met him in spring 1850. After accompanying Snow to Italy in June, he was assigned in November 1850 to open the work in Switzerland, and in summer 1851 he was joined by his wife, Fanny, and his daughter as he presided over the Swiss Mission. Though ardent and articulate in defending the Church against anti-Mormon writers in Europe, both T. B. H. and Fanny became disenchanted with Mormonism after emigrating to Utah, wrote scathing exposés of the Church, and became well-known Mormon dissenters. See Ronald W. Walker, "The Stenhouses and the Making of a Mormon Image," *Journal of Mormon History* 1 (1974): 51–72.

4. Lorenzo Snow, *The Italian Mission* (London: W. Aubrey, 1851), 13–14, 22–23.

5. Snow, *Italian Mission*, 14–15.

6. After having been called by Snow in England, Woodard stayed behind to make arrangements for the care of his wife and two daughters. Eventually he was

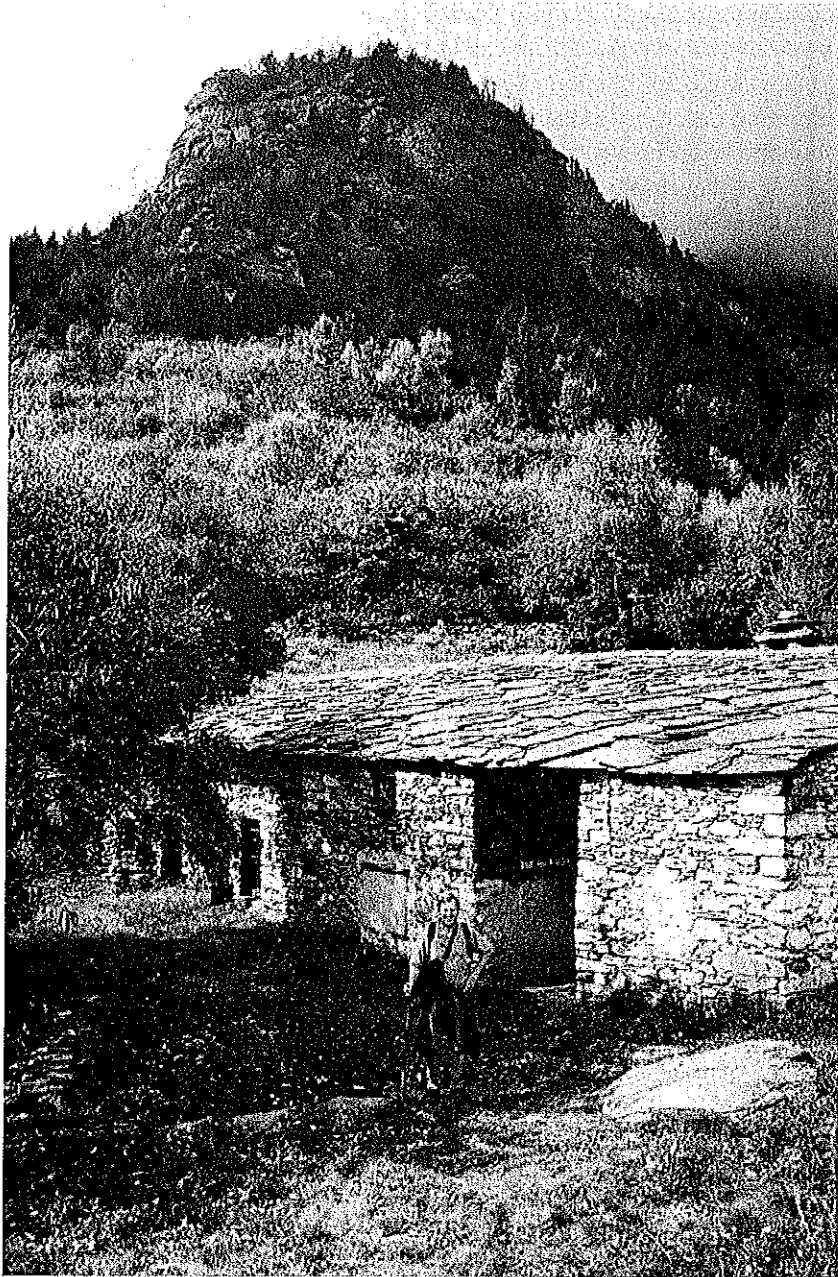


FIGURE 6. Rodney Boynton, of the BYU Italian Department, standing in front of a traditional Waldensian stone house. In the background is Monte Casteluzzo, the bold outcropping of rock that is the likely site of Lorenzo Snow's dedicatory prayer in 1850. Photo courtesy James Toronto.

he had met and called as a missionary while visiting the London Conference several months earlier. On September 19, 1850, one day after Woodard arrived in Torre Pellice, Snow proposed that the missionaries “should commence our public business,” meaning to shift their approach from one of quietly fostering good will to one of openly preaching Mormonism.⁷

To initiate this change, Snow, Stenhouse, and Woodard ascended a high mountain near Torre Pellice, and there on a projecting rock formation, Snow offered a prayer dedicating Italy to the preaching of the gospel and imploring God to prepare the hearts and minds of the Italian people to hear the message of his servants (figs. 7 and 8).⁸ Motions were then made and carried to formally organize the Church in Italy, with Snow as president and Stenhouse as secretary. The three missionaries then sang hymns and took turns praying and prophesying about the future of the Italian Mission.⁹ When they had completed their business, they were reluctant to leave a place of such great natural beauty and rich spiritual outpouring. Snow

counseled (probably by Snow) to “leave them with the Church in London” and proceed to Italy. “After bidding many farewells, I left my family with no other provisions than what might be given at the sacrament meetings of two branches. But this being found insufficient, the sum of ten shillings a week was afterwards allowed them.” Jabez Woodard, “Autobiography” and “On His Mission in the Piedmont Valley, Italy,” in “Writings,” typescript, Utah State Historical Society, Salt Lake City.

7. Snow, *Italian Mission*, 15.

8. Although Snow’s account suggests that all four missionaries (Snow, Stenhouse, Toronto, and Woodard) participated in this defining event in LDS history in Italy, Snow recorded earlier that Toronto had left Torre Pellice six weeks before. Apparently, Toronto’s health had suffered during the eight-month journey from Utah, but once back in Italy he “became very anxious to visit his friends in Sicily. As I felt it proper for him to do so, he took his departure at the beginning of August.” Snow, *Italian Mission*, 13.

9. Snow’s accounts of this historic meeting are found in *Millennial Star* 12 (1850): 371–73, and *Italian Mission*, 15–17. As far as we know, there is no documentary evidence that Snow ever uttered the phrase, well known and oft repeated by members and missionaries in Italy today, “Italy will blossom as the rose.” However, on several occasions he and other missionaries expressed the same idea but in different language. During the September 19, 1850, dedicatory event, the following prophesies were recorded: Snow: “The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, now organized, will increase and multiply, and continue its existence in Italy till that portion of Israel dwelling in these countries shall have heard and received the fulness of the Gospel.” Stenhouse: “From this time the work will commence, and nothing will hinder its progress; and before we are called to return, many will rejoice, and bear testimony to the principles of Truth.” Woodard: “The opposition which may be brought against this Church will, in a visible and peculiar manner, advance its interests; and the Work of God will at length go from this land to other nations of the earth.” Snow, *Italian Mission*, 16.

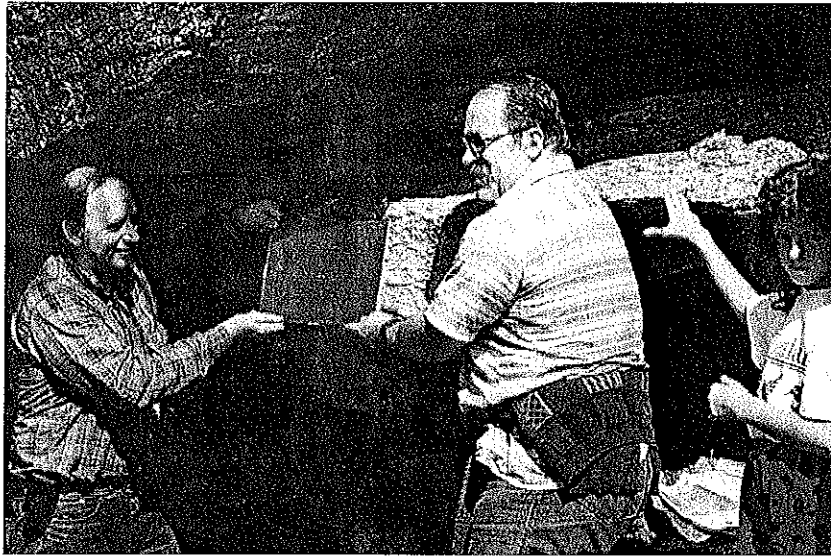


FIGURE 7. Photo of the May 31, 1997, ceremony to place a plaque on a large boulder on Mount Castelluzzo, overlooking Torre Pellice, Italy. It marks the approximate site of Lorenzo Snow's 1850 dedicatory prayer. The site has continued over the years to be a pilgrimage destination for LDS members, missionaries, and tourists. Photo courtesy of the public affairs department of the LDS Church in Italy. Left to right: Sergio Griffa, Gianni D'Amore, and Carolina Cappa.

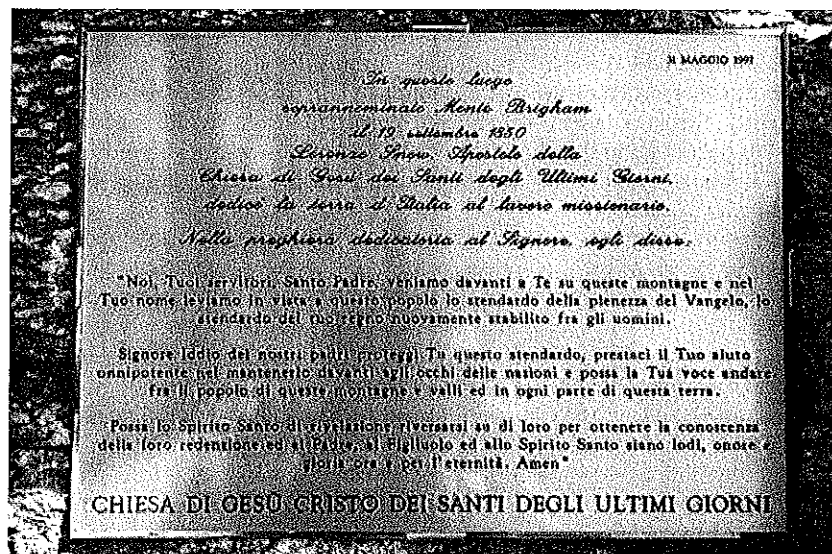


FIGURE 8. A plaque placed May 31, 1997, marking the approximate site of Lorenzo Snow's 1850 dedicatory prayer. Photo courtesy of the public affairs department of the LDS Church in Italy.

proposed that, in honor of the momentous occasion, they call the high mountain "Mount Brigham" and the bold projecting rock on which they stood the "Rock of Prophecy."¹⁰

The missionaries descended the steep slopes, reaching Torre Pellice at dusk after a physically exhausting but spiritually exhilarating day. A new chapter was opening in the Italian Mission, and Snow took care to mark the transition from a private to a public posture with a symbolic act: "As a sign to all who might visit us, we nailed to the wall of my chamber the likenesses of Joseph and Hyrum Smith. From that day opportunities began to occur for proclaiming our message."¹¹ Over the next seventeen years, before the mission closed in 1867, approximately 180 Waldensian converts joined the Church, and about seventy of them emigrated to Utah in three separate companies during the 1850s. Among these Italian settlers were the Beus, Malan, Bertoch, Chatelain, Cardon, Pons, Stalle, and Gaudin families, who became prominent in Utah life.¹²

Intermittent efforts to preach the gospel in Italy were carried out over the next century. In the late nineteenth century, a few missionaries, including some of Waldensian descent, renewed proselyting efforts in northern Italy. Some Italians were converted before World War II by reading LDS publications: the most prominent example is Vincenzo di Francesca, whose conversion story was told in a 1988 Church film, *How Rare a Possession*. During World War II, LDS servicemen's branches were established in several locations in Italy, but no formal proselyting efforts were undertaken.¹³

10. Though it is impossible to know with certainty where, exactly, these events occurred, anyone who visits the Pellice Valley will find it plausible to assume that the "high mountain" referred to by Snow is the most prominent one overlooking Torre Pellice, Monte Vandalino, and the "bold projecting rock" would likely be the outcropping of cliffs called Monte Castelluzzo, a striking geological feature on the southern slope of Vandalino.

11. Snow, *Italian Mission*, 17.

12. For more on the first Italian Mission and emigration of converts to Utah, see Michael W. Homer, "Like a Rose in the Wilderness: The Mormon Mission in the Kingdom of Sardinia," *Mormon Historical Studies* 1 (Fall 2000): 25–62; Michael W. Homer, "An Immigrant Story: Three Orphaned Italians in Early Utah Territory," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 70 (Summer 2002): 196–214; James A. Toronto, "A Continual War, Not of Arguments, but of Bread and Cheese: Opening the First LDS Mission in Italy, 1849–67," *Journal of Mormon History* 31 (Summer 2005): 188–232.

13. For analysis of reasons for the LDS Church's long absence from Italy, see Eric R. Dursteler, "One-Hundred Years of Solitude: Mormonism in Italy, 1867–1964," *International Journal of Mormon Studies* 4 (2011): 119–48.

During the 1950s and early 1960s, a number of Italians were baptized through informal LDS contacts with Italians both inside and outside Italy.¹⁴

In November 1964, while serving as president of the European Mission, which consisted of twelve missions and four stakes, Elder Ezra Taft Benson of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles went to Rome to discuss with Italian government officials the prospect of reopening missionary work in Italy. In the 1950s, during his tenure as U.S. Secretary of Agriculture in the Eisenhower administration, Benson had become well acquainted with several Italian diplomats, even receiving a distinguished award for his assistance to the Italian people: "So grateful was the Italian government for Secretary Benson's efforts in helping to solve its food shortages that it awarded him the High Cross of the Order of Merit of the Italian Republic in recognition."¹⁵ These warm relations with key decision makers in the Italian government would prove invaluable in the eventual reestablishment of the Italian Mission. One of Benson's biographers noted that his "stature as a former cabinet member gained him entry [that] might otherwise have proven inaccessible." One of his acquaintances, Minister of Agriculture Mario Ferrari-Aggridi, was especially helpful in arranging appointments with senior officials in the Department of Church Affairs in Rome in late November 1964. During a meeting with the U.S. ambassador and the Italian minister of religion, an LDS observer noted with surprise that Benson was "greeted with open arms. It was evident he had the love and respect of both men and a friendly exchange took place, as well as assurance that our missionaries would be welcome to proselyte in Italy."¹⁶ During this November 1964 visit to Italy, Benson organized the Italian District of the Swiss Mission, and on February 27, 1965, twenty-two Italian-speaking elders from the Swiss Mission (presided over by John M. Russon) arrived in Milan to preach the gospel in the newly formed Italian zone of the mission. Within seven months, the new zone was leading the Swiss Mission in baptisms.

14. James A. Toronto, "Italy," in *Encyclopedia of Latter-day Saint History*, ed. Arnold K. Garr, Donald Q. Cannon, and Richard O. Cowan (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 2000), 556–58.

15. Francis M. Gibbons, *Ezra Taft Benson: Statesman, Patriot, Prophet of God* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1996), 210.

16. Sheri L. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson: A Biography* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1987), 376–77, 380. The observer was Wanda Duns, wife of John Duns Jr., who served as the president of the Italian Mission when it was reestablished in 1966. It is unclear whether the Dunses met with Benson and Italian officials during their years in Italy prior to or after their mission call in August 1966.

After a century-long hiatus from formal missionary work, the Italian Mission was reopened in Florence on August 2, 1966, by Elder Benson. John Duns was called as president and was accompanied by his wife, Wanda, and their daughter, Teri. In December 1966, Benson sent a glowing report to the First Presidency describing the progress of the mission and giving suggestions for further growth:

The missionary work is taking hold and the spirit of the missionaries is most satisfying. They have had eighteen baptisms since the mission was created August 2nd of this year. . . . We now have two Italian branches and seven combined servicemen and Italian branches operating. Three missionary schools are in operation where new missionaries remain for approximately four weeks and are taught the languages, the proselyting lessons and something of the customs and habits of the people. There are 114 missionaries in Italy, with two zones, headquartered in Brescia and Naples. A small Italian branch has been organized at Palermo, Sicily. All halls are being rented for joint use for meetings and quarters for missionaries, with the glass front used for displaying Church literature and exhibit materials. These quarters are proving quite satisfactory and are costing about \$50.00 per month.

He recommended, based on these results, "that the quota of missionaries in Italy be gradually built up to about 180."¹⁷

In the same report, Benson also gave details of the dedicatory prayer service that he conducted in Torre Pellice on November 10, 1966, a historic event made all the more memorable and dramatic by the fact that the dedication ceremony coincided with devastating floods that had inundated northern Italy one week earlier. The dedicatory ceremony was originally scheduled to be held in Florence at a mission conference, but Benson directed that it be moved to Turin when he heard about the flooding, some of the heaviest in Italy's history, in and around Florence. Elder Benson's record and contemporary news accounts in Italy indicate that no gas, heat, light, or water were available in Florence; that the water level in some places reached sixteen feet; that many areas were under three feet of mud; that most of the shops in the downtown area were destroyed; and that damage to art treasures amounted to \$159 million and to the nation as a whole to almost \$3 billion.¹⁸ Under the circumstances, then, it was impossible to hold a meeting in Florence, and even when the ceremonies were

17. Ezra Taft Benson, Report to First Presidency, November 23, 1966, Church History Library.

18. Benson, Report to First Presidency. See also Franco Nencini, *Firenze: i giorni del diluvio* (Florence: Sansoni Editore, 1966); Katherine Kressman Taylor, *Florence: Ordeal by Water* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1967).

moved to the Turin area, many missionaries were unable to travel there because trains and other modes of transportation in northern Italy were inoperable.

Despite the adverse circumstances, a group of thirty-five missionaries from less-flooded areas in the north (the districts of Bologna, Padova, Verona, Vicenza, and Turin and a few of the office staff from Florence) assembled for a conference on Thursday, November 10, at 1:40 p.m. in a rented hall at Via Belfiore 38 in Turin, with Elder and Sister Benson, President and Sister Duns, and their daughter, Teri Duns.¹⁹ President Duns welcomed the group and expressed regret that some of the elders and sisters could not attend because of the flooding. The meeting was opened by singing "Di Profeti Ringraziamo Dio" ("We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet"). Following the invocation, Benson spoke about how the Lord often uses tragedy to bring about blessings and expressed gratitude that the mission home and offices in Florence were above the flood level and not damaged. Several elders then gave talks, describing the progress of missionary work in their districts and exhorting those present to live mission rules and stay dedicated to the work. Benson stood again to address the missionaries, reminding them that it "doesn't matter where we serve, but how," urging them not to become discouraged, and expressing his hope to return the following spring to talk personally with each missionary. Duns followed with an admonition to study and work hard, and to refrain from attending Communist functions and Catholic masses. The mini-mission conference closed with a hymn, "Loda l'Uomo" ("Praise to the Man"), and a benediction. Benson stated then that "our big responsibility is to find a suitable place where we can all assemble" and offer the dedicatory prayer for this land. "Our first thing, while it is still light and sunny, is to get up onto some elevation somewhere," noting that "we have not predetermined any particular spot." Indeed, from that point on, the afternoon's events

19. This account of the rededication is based on several sources: "Dedicatory Prayer of Italy," audio recording of the meetings in Turin and Torre Pellice, Church History Library; Italy Rome Mission (1974-), "Mission Journals 1966-1978," Church History Library; Teri Duns, Journal, copy of excerpts in author's possession; and Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*. The Bensons had flown from Germany, where they had been attending a servicemen's conference in Berchtesgaden, to Milan, where they were met at the airport by Duns and driven to Turin. Wanda and Teri Duns were already in Turin because, while the family was returning to Italy from the conference in Germany, President Duns learned of the severe flooding in Florence and decided to drop them off in Turin for their safety before he drove on to mission headquarters to check on conditions and deliver clean drinking water to the missionaries.

proceeded in an impromptu fashion: it was clear that neither the location in Torre Pellice nor the agenda for the hillside meeting accompanying the prayer nor the words of the prayer itself were “predetermined” but would emerge as dictated by the Spirit of the Lord.

Benson was anxious that all thirty-five missionaries attend the dedicatory service, despite the challenges of finding transportation during the Italian afternoon break time. After some discussion about logistics—how many people could be accommodated in the mission van and zone car, and whether they could rent another car or two—and in accordance with Benson’s feeling that “the Lord approved of our plans,” the group drove in several vehicles to the mountain village of Torre Pellice, a distance of about forty kilometers southwest of Turin. As the group traveled up into the Pellice Valley, the road became more steep and narrow and the villages more remote. Wanda Duns remembered that “President Benson sat with his lap full of papers, scanning the territory and reading from a historical description of the first dedication. He was anxious to rededicate in as close a proximity to where President Snow had stood as was possible to determine.” Because early mission records indicated that Snow, Woodard, and Stenhouse had given the name “Mount Brigham” to the place of the 1850 dedication, Benson wondered if they might find a sign along the road or a name on the map to guide them to the location of the historical site. But no such clues were found, and after two elders were sent back to a nearby town to inquire about the whereabouts of Mount Brigham and returned with no specific information, the group continued on up the road. Sister Duns described how Benson eventually selected the site for the rededication: “Suddenly President Benson said, ‘Stop here!’ He got out of the car, pointed his finger up the mountain, and said, ‘I think we’ll climb here.’ About three-fourths of the distance to the top [of one of the foothills] President Benson stopped and waited for the rest of us to catch up. Then he announced, ‘This is it, this is the spot!’”²⁰ Teri Duns, age twelve at the time, recalled the crisp feeling in the November air, the crunch of fallen leaves under her feet as she climbed, and the difficulty experienced by her mother and Sister Benson, “who with some strong handed help from their husbands, managed to climb the hillside in their high heeled shoes” and dresses. Although the day was somewhat overcast, the hillside clearing chosen by Elder Benson commanded a spectacular view of the valleys and mountains of the Cottian Alps.

20. Dew, *Ezra Taft Benson*, 390–91.

At 4:30 p.m., after the whole party of missionaries had ascended to the clearing on the hillside where the Bensons waited, they stood close together and sang a hymn, "Come, Come, Ye Saints," to open the meeting, followed by a prayer offered by President Duns and another hymn, "We Thank Thee, O God, for a Prophet" (figs. 9–12). Benson, speaking slowly, deliberately, and with great emotion, then began his apostolic prayer rededicating "the great nation of Italy" for the preaching of the gospel, noting that it had been 116 years since a previous Apostle, Lorenzo Snow, had first dedicated the land "in the same vicinity, as nearly as we can determine." Standing "in this Thy first temple, the great open spaces," he touched on motives of Christian love that imbue the activities of many missionaries and invoked the blessings of God on Italy, its government, and its people, asking that he soften the hearts of those who meet the missionaries:

We know, Heavenly Father, that Thou dost love Thy children and we have in our hearts a love for the Italian people as we assemble here today, and, Holy Father, we pray Thee that Thy blessings may be showered upon them. . . . Wilt Thou touch their hearts as Thy servants approach them and deliver them in their humility the gospel of salvation. Wilt Thou bless them with believing hearts. Wilt Thou temper their spirits that they may be willing to hear the message.

Italy, he predicted, would prove a productive mission field yielding thousands of converts: "We feel in our hearts under the inspiration of Thy spirit that this Thy work has a great future in this land of Italy. We feel to predict under the authority of the Holy Priesthood and under inspiration of heaven that thousands of Thy children in this land will be brought into the truth and into membership in Thy great church and kingdom that has been restored to the earth." Acknowledging that the Church "can prosper only in an atmosphere of freedom and liberty," Benson prayed in behalf of Italy's national leaders to the end that peace would be maintained, that the land would be shielded from "insidious forces which would destroy the free agency of man," and that religious liberty would be promoted in order to allow new faiths in Italy the "freedom to present their cause and their beliefs." The new Italian converts to the Church received specific apostolic benediction:

Some have accepted the truth, Holy Father, wilt Thou be close to them; wilt Thou bless them that they may be true to their covenants. . . . We pray that Thou wilt bless the Saints with a spirit of missionary service that they may join with the missionaries in giving them referrals and leading them to their friends and neighbors and associates and loved ones that the message of the gospel may spread.

Benson also implored the Almighty to temper the natural elements in Italy so "that there may be no further severe tragedies" and asked that "the



FIGURE 7. At the rededication service on November 10, 1966. *Left to right:* Elder Ezra Taft Benson, Sister Benson, Sister Duns, President Duns.



FIGURE 8. Leaders at the service rededicating Italy on November 10, 1966. *Left to right:* Flora Benson, Ezra Taft Benson, Wanda Duns, John Duns Jr.



FIGURE 9. Group at the rededication of Italy on November 10, 1966, near Torre Pellice, Italy. Included in the group are Ezra Taft Benson, Flora Benson, John Duns Jr., Wanda Duns, John Duns III, Teri Duns, and other missionaries including Edward Hunter, Charles Vance, Tom Capece, John Grincer, John Newman, Robert Bishop, Irwin Jacob, Merilee Swift, Dennis Broadbent, Martin Neal, Thomas DiMarco, Brent Payne, Robert Gibson, Howard Anderson, Robert Smythe, David Rohde, Elder Layton, and Elder Vezzani. The authors thank Jim Jacobs and Rodney Boynton for identifying some of the missionaries in the photo.



FIGURE 10. Group at the dedicatory prayer service on a hillside near Torre Pellice, Italy, November 10, 1966. Elder Ezra Taft Benson is in the middle of the group. See *Italy Rome Mission (1974-)*, Scrapbook 1966-1974, Church History Library, for more photographs.

sunshine of Thy Sweet Spirit spread over this land that there may be a resurgence of spirituality, a desire to seek for the truth." The prayer ended with a vow, spoken on behalf of all the missionaries in Italy, to "rededicate our lives unto Thee and all that we have and are to the upbuilding of Thy Kingdom in the world and the furtherance of truth and righteousness among Thy people."²¹

At the conclusion of the prayer, Teri Duns recalled, Elder Benson continued for a few moments to look "solemnly into the heavens as tears streamed down his face." As rain began to fall, the group sang one verse of two hymns that Benson selected from among suggestions he solicited from the missionaries—"I Need Thee Every Hour" and "God Be with You"—and a closing prayer was offered. Benson then assigned the mission secretary to "make a minute" of the dedication, as he did of the meeting in Turin. President Duns stated that they would write the account first in shorthand, then compose a complete version and send it to Benson in Salt Lake City. Benson replied that there was no hurry to receive the dedicatory prayer itself, but that he would like a minute of the meeting by Monday morning in his office in Frankfurt, if possible. Before translating the prayer into Italian, the mission staff should send it to him for review and approval. He directed that the mission prepare a "story with pictures" to be sent to him later in Salt Lake City: three copies of the minute, the dedicatory prayer, and the photos—two for the Historian's Office, and one for the *Church News*. Benson then underscored the significance of the occasion by observing: "This is history—really history. It's wonderful. Be sure you all enter this in your journals."

Benson's official report to the First Presidency describing the momentous occasion in Torre Pellice was succinct:

There we climbed the mountain side and as near as we could determine, stood in approximately the same area where Elder Lorenzo Snow had dedicated the land [in 1850]. It was a beautiful setting, overlooking the lovely green valley—the moan of the beautiful, clear river reaching us from the distance and two mountain ranges beyond, with snow-capped mountains. Tears were shed as we received the witness that many of our Father's children, long in darkness, would now receive the Gospel. Songs of praise rang through the valley as villagers watched, curiously. It was a memorable and inspirational occasion.²²

21. Italy Rome Mission, Manuscript history and historical reports, Quarterly Historical Report ending December 31, 1966, 4, Church History Library.

22. Ezra Taft Benson, Report to First Presidency, November 23, 1966, Church History Library. It is noteworthy that Benson, in both his prayer and his report, refrained from referring to the location he selected as the exact site where Lorenzo

The twice-dedicated land of Italy has produced much spiritual fruit for the LDS Church during the past half century of renewed missionary labors. Benson's rededication of the land seemed to mark a watershed event for the Church in southern Europe, with Spain (1969), Portugal (1974), Greece (1978), and Yugoslavia (1978) being opened to full-time missionary work shortly after Italy. Though the number of Italian converts has been unspectacular, the Church has expanded steadily and solidified its place in Italy's religious landscape. By June 1971, Church growth necessitated the formation of two missions, and by 1977 four missions had been organized, with headquarters in Catania, Rome, Milan, and Padova. Continuing growth (total membership is about twenty-four thousand with an activity rate of 25 to 30 percent in most Church units) and maturation of the Italian membership have created the conditions for greater autonomy and self-reliance. After years of groundwork, a milestone was achieved in February 1993 when Italian President Oscar Luigi Scalfaro signed papers granting formal legal status to the Church. A more advantageous but difficult-to-obtain level of full legal recognition (called an *Intesa*) by the Italian state was approved on July 30, 2012, when the president of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, signed the *Intesa* into law, making the Church a "partner of the state."²³

As of 2010, the number of missions was reduced to two (in Rome and Milan), but seven stakes functioning under local Italian leadership (in Palermo, Puglia, Rome, Alessandria, Milan, Verona, and Venice) have strengthened the image and presence of the Church. Since the reopening of the mission, many descendants of the first converts and missionaries have returned to Italy as missionaries. Italian converts have served as missionaries in Italy and abroad, as mission and temple presidents and Area Seventies, as full-time coordinators and part-time teachers in the seminary and institute program, as well as contributing to the worldwide Church in leadership and education. The Rome temple and visitors' center were

Snow had offered the first dedicatory prayer. Instead, he mentioned that the missionaries who assembled on November 10, 1966, stood "in the same vicinity" and "in approximately the same area" as Mount Brigham (most likely Monte Vandalino) and the Rock of Prophecy (most likely Monte Castelluzzo) where Snow and his companions had previously gathered. The actual site of the 1850 dedication is a remote, rocky location much higher up the rugged slopes of Vandalino that requires a strenuous hike of two or three hours' duration to reach.

23. The new legislation was officially published in the Supplement of the Official Journal (*Gazzetta Ufficiale*) on August 7 and took full legal effect beginning August 22, 2012. Available at <http://www.gazzettaufficiale.it/guridb/dispatcher?service=1&datagu=2012-08-07&task=dettaglio&numgu=183&redaz=012G0146&tmstp=1344374712391>.

announced by President Thomas S. Monson at the October 2008 general conference, and ground was broken on October 23, 2010. Due for dedication in the latter half of 2014, the temple will provide a tangible symbol of how prophetic vision, missionary perseverance, and convert resilience have combined over time to root Mormonism in Italian soil.

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