



1863-2013

Historical Exhibition

the BAPTISTS and ITALY

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UCEBI Historical Commission

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Baptists and Italy (1863 -2013)



It was pure passion that encouraged first individuals and then the English and American mission to send their missionaries to Italy shortly after its Unification in 1861, convinced that they would find a fruitful terrain. They reasoned that albeit Catholics, Italians were pagans and would welcome with open arms the Baptist principles of liberty. If the unification of Italy meant creating Italians,

once this was achieved it was then all-important for them to become Christians, and the Baptists were enthusiastically in the frontline to achieve this difficult task. However, as often occurs, reality is different from what we imagine. What should have been a great victory proved to be a slow and difficult task. The people of Italy were still far from being Italians (but has that objective yet been achieved?) and Italians, after the initial fervor, returned to the fold of the mother church. For the first Baptists this was the beginning of the real work, along the byways, in the villages and over the mountains, not only the geographical ones, but also the metaphysical mind-sets: prejudice and superstition. It was essential to proclaim the gospel to everyone and this undertaking was linked to another, which was equally ambitious: opening schools and orphanages, furthering culture and social engagement.

From the outset Baptism in Italy combined two characteristics: each local community was a free (congregational) church, but thanks to the missionary societies, there was an organizational structure at a national level. This characteristic attracted many Protestant intellectuals, above all from free churches and constituted sociologically a structure suited to a truly Baptist movement: the presence of intellectuals, its organization, its local roots, and, significantly, a clear identity, above all centred on believers' baptism .

The establishment of churches with their own characteristics went hand-in-hand with the consolidation of the identity of different Protestant churches in competition with one another. This competition was often experienced with a guilty conscience and some historians see in

this “confessional spirit” the bane of Italian Protestantism, because if Protestants had been united, they would have certainly conquered Italy! The fragmentation of Italian Protestantism is a negative characteristic, but the alternative is not in one united Protestant church in opposition to the Roman Catholic Church. Protestants should have focused then, and also today, on an intelligent pluralism based on a reciprocal spirit of service and co-operation. As Pastor Enrico Paschetto declared in 1885, shortly after the birth of the Christian Apostolic Baptist Union “*We advocate Union between the Protestant churches that are in Italy, and not the organization of one Italian Protestant Church.* .

A map of the Baptist churches in Italy in the first fifty years shows two features: from the outset it concentrates in the large urban areas and, at the same time, in some rural areas, above all in the eastern regions of the south. While the urban Baptist churches were more middle-class and more intellectual, the rural churches were closer to the struggles of the peasants and were more involved in evangelization. A single itinerant evangelist (colportore) in just a few years was able to open tens of different preaching stations, which then became churches, preparing new evangelists. If in a hundred and fifty years we can identify the faces and names of men and women who made an important contribution to the spread of Baptism in Italy, with the same sense of gratitude we must remember those anonymous and humble Baptists who lived their faith with steadfast faithfulness to God, generously and courageously, despite persecution. A monument should be erected to each of these unknown soldiers!

The contrast between a more intellectual and a more working-class Baptism is a feature that has characterized the 150 years of Baptist history. The tension between the city and the countryside has been both the strength and the weakness of Italian Baptism. Strength because it provided evidence that a religious movement is successful only if it is able to combine theological and cultural insight with the daily and arduous practice of discipleship - that strength was reflected in the growing number of churches and their membership. Weakness, because the social changes in Italy, emigration, uncontrolled urban growth, the depopulation of the countryside, dramatically affected many Baptist churches, radically changing and very often inevitably weakening them - this weakness was reflected in a decrease in numbers. This meant that there were highs and lows in the growth of Italian Baptism, leaps forward and setbacks, with the awareness that it is more a movement

than an institution, but in the face of historical changes able to reinvent itself, making changes and meeting new challenges, in the light of the Word of God.

Obviously historians when analyzing Baptist churches, will also take into account the great events which have marked our country, the two World Wars, Fascism, the economic boom accelerating secularization. These data can be seen in the light of the limits of a denomination, the Baptists, for too long under the umbrella of the missions, above all the American Baptists, which resulted in the tardy achievement of the complete autonomy and responsibility of the churches, also to be taken into consideration are the effects that the great social and cultural revolution of the 1960s and 70s had on the traditions of our churches and on the ways they regarded the world. Historians will also point out the economic downturn in the past thirty years of our country, which many describe as one in decline. However, a simple fact remains, the past with its highlights and disappointments is over and the future depends on our ability to face the events of history without passively suffering from their consequences, but rather re-examining them and modifying them in the light of a constant faithfulness to God's Word, a faithfulness that has characterized the best intellectual Baptists, but also, and I would say above all, the humblest of Italian agricultural workers.

Raffaele Volpe (President of the Italian Baptist Union 2010-2016)



1 The genealogical tree of Baptism

The seed, from which the tree of Christian churches grew, is the Word of God, incarnated in Jesus Christ. whose blood nourished a huge tree. In the two thousand years since His death and resurrection, various branches have grown from its trunk, which have expressed different ways of understanding and living the Christian faith.

From the great branch of Protestantism, formed from the graft of the Reformation. various offshoots have grown, among which Baptism. This took place at the beginning of the seventeenth century, thanks to the encounter between two important events which gave birth to that branch: anabaptism in continental Europe, which was part of the radical wing of the Reformation, and the English Separatist Puritanism, a movement formed by small communities of believers, who separated from the Church of England and who dissented with the ecclesiology of Puritanism. This secondary branch gave birth to shoots which were to produce lasting fruit.

- **believers' baptism**, that is the baptism of those who freely and responsibly respond to Jesus' call and confess that He is Christ, Lord and Saviour;
- **freedom of conscience**, the principle that asserts that faith cannot be transmitted by the family, nor imposed by the state or by a church;
- **religious freedom for all**, of whatever faith or of no faith, which implies a coexistence that respects diversity and a recognition of human rights;
- **the separation between the state and the church**, between political and civil spheres and between religious and spiritual ones
- **the autonomy of each community in fellowship.**

2 The origins

The birth of Baptist churches is linked to the religious turmoil that characterized England at the end of the sixteenth century and the beginning of the seventeenth. At that time, to escape persecution by civil and religious authorities, many members of separatist groups sought refuge abroad, particularly in Holland, which was tolerant toward those who did not conform to the creeds of the state church. In 1607, a small community of separatists, led by John Smyth (1554-1612), decided to move to Amsterdam, making a pact with God “to follow His paths [...] whatever the cost”.

The separatists, coming into contact with a community of Mennonites (Dutch Anabaptists), became convinced that to rebuild the church modelled on the New Testament, it was mandatory that whoever publicly confessed Christ as Lord should be baptized again (like the Mennonites), because as a seal of the spiritual pact, it appertained only to those able to understand and respect the conditions of the pact: uprightness on the part of man and promise on the part of God. Smyth decided to baptize himself, by immersion, and then the other believers (some historians point out that this was the beginning of the Baptist movement). However, shortly afterwards he realized that he should be baptized by one of the Mennonite pastors, who, because of their apostolic succession, had more authority, namely the uninterrupted link between the Primitive Church and Anabaptism.

Most of the members, agreeing with Smyth that baptism could only be administered by pastors who had been baptized correctly, asked to be received into the Mennonite community.

A minority, led by Thomas Helwys (c. 1550-1615) disagreed, as it did not accept some aspects of the Mennonite theology and, in 1611, expressed their doctrinal views in a “declaration of faith”, which is one of the first systematic statements of Baptist theology: having reaffirmed the Trinitarian doctrine of the Christian faith, it stated that “particular congregations” should meet “to pray, prophecy, break bread and follow the holy commandments”, even if their ministers” were in prison, sick or in any way unable to attend the church”. Baptism, as “a visible manifestation of dying to sin and walking in newness of Life, pertained only to those who had made a profession of faith.

Helwys' followers decided that they should not avoid persecution and went back to England, knowing that this might mean "sacrificing their lives to Christ and his truth". So, in 1612, at Spitalfields (a village near London and today part of the East End), they founded the first Baptist Church in England, which, according to some historians marked the real beginning of Baptism.

Despite the general climate of intolerance and the persecution of dissenters that typified both the reign of James I (1603-25) and that of his son Charles I (1625-49), within a short time another four communities of believers were formed, always in the London area, which from 1626 called themselves "General Baptists" because they shared the "general" concept of redemption, that is that Jesus Christ died for all mankind.

Some years later, within the Dissenters, another branch of Baptists came to life, that of the "Particular Baptists", who followed Calvinist theology and believed that Christ's atonement was restricted to the elect or "saints".

A third, and smaller branch, were the "Seventh Day Baptists", so-called for their belief that, in accordance with the Bible, the Sabbath should be kept.

In 1644, seven "Particular" Baptist churches in London adopted a confession of faith, which was

corrected and expanded in 1646, in which for the first time baptism by immersion was prescribed: "Scripture teaches that the way to administer [baptism] is to emerge or immerse the whole body in water". Up until the civil wars, Baptists were generally held to be a radical sect and as such opposed and persecuted, first by the Anglican church and then by the Presbyterians. It was only in March 1647 that Parliament passed a decree of relative tolerance but a little more than a year later; a new decree was approved "for the prevention of the spread of heresies and blasphemous opinions". One of the offenses carrying a prison sentence was the teaching "that baptism of children is illegitimate or of no value, and that those [baptized as children] must be baptized again", and this applied to Baptists' beliefs. However, during Cromwell's rule, Baptists were shown a certain tolerance, due in part to their participation in the civil wars in the ranks of the New Model Army, but they also served as chaplains and officers. This was only one aspect that distinguished the early Baptists from the Anabaptists, who refused to take up arms. The situation once again worsened after the restoration of the monarchy, and the Church of England once more became the state church. Between

1661 and 1688 many Baptists and Dissenters were arrested and imprisoned, among them John Bunyan, who was incarcerated for twelve years, writing various works, one of which was his spiritual autobiography: *Grace abounding to the Chief of sinners* (1666) and his most well-known book, *Pilgrims Progress*. (1678).



John Bunyan
(1628-1688)

The persecution ended in May 1689 when Parliament passed the Toleration Act which allowed the majority of Dissenters the right to worship freely. Shortly afterwards, the Baptists convened a general assembly which did not have the authority to make decisions but approved recommendations and proposals such as the one to set up a fund in order to assist the poorer churches and to prepare promising young ministers for the ministry.



Meanwhile, the spread of the Baptist movement, which for a long time had been hampered in England, found new opportunities in another context, the American colonies, where in 1638 Roger Williams, the advocate of free conscience, founded the first Baptist church in America. The shoots of Baptism developed rapidly and Baptist communities were established first throughout the British Empire and then beyond its boundaries.

Roger Williams
(1603-1684)

3 The first Baptist missions in Italy

For two and a half centuries, Baptists were unable to put down roots in Italy, because political and religious authorities, having led the Protestant Reformation, barred means all those expressions of Christianity which differed from the Roman Catholic Church. It was only with the Risorgimento when new opportunities arose for freedom and the power of the Catholic Church was partly reduced that Baptists could also begin their work of evangelization.

The first Baptist missionaries to arrive in Italy were two Englishmen, Edward Clarke and James Wall, who in 1863 paid an exploratory visit to Italy. In the same year, Wall settled in Bologna, moving to Rome in 1870, two years later he received the official sponsorship of the *Baptist Missionary Society* and opened Sunday Schools and places of worship in Rome and in the area of the Castelli Romani, south of Rome. His activity extended to Naples, where in 1877 Pastor Pier Enrico Jahier founded a community, Genoa, Turin, where he collaborated with another missionary, William K. Landels, and the Susa Valley.

Clarke settled in La Spezia, where he founded *The Spezia Mission for Italy* with the aim of evangelizing Italy, outside the limits of a denominational framework. From the initial nucleus in Spezia, the work of the mission extended as far as Tuscany and also reached Emilia and Veneto. By 1883, there were fifteen communities, as well as schools and social work in La Spezia and Pistoia.

The work of the American Baptist Mission (the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention) began in Rome with William Cote when the city became part of united Italy. G.B. Taylor took over from Cote and greatly encouraged the expansion of Baptist work.



Edward Clarke (1820-1912)

In the thirty-four years Taylor spent in Italy, he contributed to establishing churches in key cities, and assisted by other American missionaries and Italian pastors, he trained evangelists, pastors and local preachers. The work of the American mission expanded from Rome to Civitavecchia with Paolo Gardiol, then to Albano, Viterbo, Tivoli, Velletri and in Lombardy, to Milan in 1873 with Pastor Oscar Cocorda and later with Enrico Paschetto. In Piedmont, a church was opened in Torre Pellice under the leadership of Onorato Ferraris, Pastor Vincenzo Bellondi ministered in Venice, Pastors Santi Stagnitta and Ercole Volpi worked in Calabria, Apulia and Basilicata, Gaetano Fasulo in Sicily, and in Sardinia Angelo Cossu founded the church in Cagliari in 1876.

At a time beset with serious social problems, the missionaries not only opened places of worship, but also cared for the physical and cultural welfare of the people, founding orphanages, hospitals, old people's homes and organizing cultural activities and recreational clubs, as well as schools in La Spezia, Naples, Rome, Altamura and many elsewhere.

In the following years, despite all the efforts made with evangelization projects, the dream that the Italians - freed from the "papist" chains - would have accepted the good news of salvation and freedom in Jesus Christ and that one great national Protestant Church would be created, proved to be a chimera. The overwhelming majority of Italians remained, at least in name, faithful to the Catholic tradition and those Christians who were not Catholics remained divided.

G. B. Taylor Orphanage



5 Organization

- **The beginnings: La Spezia**

In 1870, *The Spezia Mission for Italy* and the Levant opened offices and a place of worship in the grounds of the Park in the town. Later the Mission extended its considerable social activities, setting up schools and orphanages.

- **The beginnings: Bologna - Roma**

James Wall, once he became the representative of the *Baptist Missionary Society* (BMS), moved in 1871 from Bologna to Rome where in 1875 he purchased a building in Piazza S. Lorenzo in Lucina to house the headquarters of the Apostolic Christian Baptist Church of Italy and a Baptist community; it remained the headquarters of the Italian Baptist Union (UCEBI) until 2017 when it was relocated to the Taylor Institute in Alessandrino, a suburb of Rome. In 1875, a second missionary, William K. Landels, arrived in Italy.

- **The beginnings: the American Mission**

The American missionary, who had founded the first Baptist community in Rome, now capital of united Italy, was replaced by G.B. Taylor in 1873. In 1878 the American mission acquired a building in Via Del Teatro Valle, where it established its headquarters and a place of worship.

- **The Beginnings: the third English mission**

A third English mission, the General Baptist Missionary Society, which had sent its representative, Nathanael Herbert Shaw to Rome, founded the third Baptist Church in Via Urbana in 1881. This mission merged with the BMS a few years later.

- **The Apostolic Christian Baptist Union (UCAB)**

Missionaries and pastors from the various missions met in Turin on 8th May 1884 to organize the Apostolic Christian Baptist Union, with the aim of co-ordinating Baptist witness in Italy and consolidating unity between the churches. The Spezia Mission maintained a good relationship with the UCAB, but did not join it. The Union adopted a statute and every three or four years held an assembly. Its first president was James Wall. The monthly periodical “Il Testimonio” was inaugurated and up until 1992 remained the official organ of Baptists in Italy.

- **Subdivision within the missions**

In 1908, in order to co-ordinate the work of missionaries, pastors and evangelists and to provide them with an opportunity to share their experiences, the American mission divided the Italian field into two sectors, the Association of Baptist churches in the North of Italy (AC-BIS) and the Association of Baptist churches in the South, (ACBIM),

In 1923, the BMS left the missionary field in Italy, leaving all its property to the American mission, which would oversee the organization of the churches until 1978.

The Spezia Mission continued its activities until 1966.



{A group photograph of the Spezia Mission leaders, helpers and teachers}

6 The response of Catholics and relations with other churches

An extremely hostile climate surrounded the beginnings of the Baptist communities, which sometimes gave rise to violence, instigated by the more fanatical Catholic clergy. There were dramatic episodes such as the one in Barletta, in the Apulia region, where in 1866 six Protestants were lynched in a riot against the Protestants. The violent hostility and assaults on itinerant evangelists, pastors and missionaries occurred throughout Italy, but the most ferocious were in the south, where there were numerous reports of attempted lynchings, beatings and the destruction of carts carrying Bibles and pamphlets.

There were countless episodes of intimidation and also assaults on churches, for example in Milan in 1876, and in Altamura (Bari), where in 1895 there was an attempt to lynch members of the small congregation, which clerical propaganda had accused of being the cause of an outbreak of smallpox and a draught. In 1906, at Boscoreale (near Pompeii), the eruption of Vesuvius was attributed to the preaching of Pastor Francesco Martinelli; in the same year, at Bisaccia in Irpinia, Pastor Lorenzo Palmieri and the American missionary James P. Stuart were beaten up. These episodes were regularly reported to the police, who occasionally provided protection for places of worship, like the defence of the Baptist Church in Piazza S. Domenico Maggiore in Naples. Even more common were the attempts to boycott and marginalize, socially, politically and economically, the Protestant “heretics”. With few exceptions, Baptist and other churches were viewed by Catholicism and in general by Italian society as alien to the national culture. One of the consequences of this attempt to alienate Baptists from social life was often the emigration of entire communities, which is what occurred in Ferrandina in the province of Matera in 1897.

The first Baptist churches became part of a minority together with the other Protestant churches present in Italy: the Waldensian Church, the Free Churches, the Methodist Churches, the Brethren and the Adventist Church, divided among themselves, sometimes with missionary strategies in competition with each other and, except for a few, but important exceptions, lacking an authentic desire to overcome denominational divisions. Baptists were viewed with a certain hostility by other Protestants and considered to be sectarian for two reasons: above all, on

account of the already mentioned practice of believers' baptism, held to be a re-baptism which did not recognize the validity of the baptism of other churches, secondly for the tendency at that time of Baptist churches to keep closed communion.

Despite these differences, encouraged by the World Protestant Alliance and some of the more progressive Protestant leaders who regarded the denominational divisions as future obstacles to the expansion of Protestantism in Italy, in 1884 a committee was chosen to coordinate the missionary work and to tackle the question of unity between the various Protestant churches. This committee convened an assembly in Florence to discuss the possibility of forming one Protestant Church, or as an alternative, a Federation of Churches. The Assembly did not reach any concrete results, but it helped to promote the conviction that it was necessary to adopt a joint strategy for the conversion of Italy to the Gospel. These first endeavors led to the convening of the first Protestant Council of Italy in 1904.



The Protestant Council of Italy (1904)

7 Expansion

Throughout the period that goes from 1863 to the beginning of the twentieth century, progress was slow but steady, without huge increases, even though in some places important progress was recorded. The itinerant evangelists selling Bibles, books and Protestant literature were crucial to the birth or consolidation of many churches. In their journeyings through towns and villages, they came into contact with spontaneous groups, organized them and reported their existence to the missions, and often they themselves set up groups through evangelization meetings.

The third phase in the opening of a church began with the arrival of a minister residing in the city.

- La Spezia and its province, Genoa, Rome and Bari and their provinces, Naples, Sardinia, Turin and the Valley of Susa were places where Baptists flourished and where churches, schools and nursery schools of a certain importance were established. The membership of the various branches shows a continual increase from the 870 baptized members in 1886 to 1,566 in 1900.

- From Rome, the work of evangelization extended to central Italy. From Bari, it reached the inland region of the Murge: Acquaviva delle Fonti, Gioia del Colle, Santeramo, Gravina, Altamura, Mottola and Taranto. The first congregation in Basilicata was formed in Miglionico by Carlo Piccinni, and from there reached Matera (where the organizer of the Peasants' movement, Luigi Loperfido, was converted), then to Cersosimo, Valsinni and Ferrandina. The region of Molise was reached from Bari in 1916, when the church of Macchia Valfortore was founded and that of Ripabottoni in 1919.

- In Naples, the three churches founded by foreign missions and by Count Oswald Papengouth were united in 1903. From there the expansion followed various routes, towards the south, the churches at Portici, Pozzuoli and Reggio Calabria, northwards to Minturno and in 1900 to Avellino and San Gregorio Magno. From Naples the English Baptist mission reached Calitri and from there, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Lioni, Raponi, Bisaccia, Pescopagano and San Vito.

- From the church in Bologna, founded by Wall, were born the churches of Carpi (1885), Mirandola (1887) and Modena. From Torre Pellice, Onorato Ferraris extended his witness to Pinerolo and Cuneo. And from Milan the communities at Novara, Lodi and Varese were founded. In the area of Venice, in 1877 Vincenzo Bellondi founded a community in Venice, managing to extend the work also to Mestre, while Clarke founded a church in Pordenone and another in Treviso.

- The church in Turin was founded by Dr. Teodoro Laura in 1877. In 1887 Landels became its minister. In 1895 Giovanni Battista Scrajber began evangelizing the Susa Valley.

- From the core work in La Spezia, Clarke's mission founded communities and social work at Marola, Arcola and Baccano in the area of La Spezia and also in Pistoia and Prato. In Genoa there was a Baptist church of the English Mission, which was entrusted to Jahier from 1880 and the American mission, which had founded a church in San Remo in 1891, established a church at Sampierdarena in



Luigi Mario Galassi (1858-1938)

1894 and one in Genoa in 1895. In 1912 the church in Chiavari was founded by Giovanni Arbanasich. In Florence the church of the English branch was founded in 1880, while the American branch was established in 1891 by the missionary John H. Eager and Pastor Luigi Mario Galassi. In 1907 the church of Ferrara was opened.

- In Sardinia in 1876 Angelo Cossu formed the first Baptist church in Cagliari and in 1886 another church at Tempio. In 1886 Pietro Arbanasich founded the church at Iglesias. For many years Antonio Fiori was minister in Cagliari and various communities were born in the region at Domusnovas (1899), Macomer (1896), Villarmosa, Gonnese (1898) and Siliqua (1904).

- The missionary work in Sicily began in 1893 in Messina when G.B. Taylor baptized the Berti family. Gaetano Fasulo founded the Baptist church in Noto in 1905 from where missionary work was undertaken, reaching Avola in 1908. The church of Florida was established in 1909 by Fasulo with the help of the itinerant evangelist Salvatore Micelli, the one in Lentini (Catania) in 1916 and in 1921 the church at Messina tried to establish a church at San Piero Patti.

8 Baptist Publications

● Il Semiatore

From 1876 to 1883, the American Mission published a periodical “Il Semiatore” (The Sower). Its intent was to forge a link between Baptists, Apostolics and others interested in Baptism, and to make Baptist principles known to other Protestants and to those outside Protestant churches. Its first editor was Oscar Cocorda.

● Il Testimonio

The Constitutive Assembly of UCAB held in May 1884 voted in favour of publishing a periodical, which represented the various Baptists, present in Italy: “Il Testimonio” (The Witness) was inaugurated, and edited by pastors Nicola Nardi-Greco, Enrico Paschetto Sr., Nicolao Papengouth and Gaetano Fasulo. For more than a century this monthly review played a key and irreplaceable role for the Baptist churches. “Il Testimonio”, which took the name of “Messaggero Evangelico” (The Evangelical Messenger) for some years following the Second World War, was replaced in 1992 by the weekly paper “Riforma” (Reformation), jointly published by Baptists, Methodists and Waldensians.



- **The” Baptist Publications Society”**

In 1890, the minister of the Apostolic Church, W.K.Landels, founded in Turin The “Baptist Publications Society” (which later became the publishing house “*Il Risveglio*” (The Awakening), with its own printing press and for about thirty years was responsible for most of the Baptist publications, mainly tracts and pamphlets with an apologetic and evangelistic leaning. In 1911, for the 50th anniversary of the Unification of Italy, it published thousands of pamphlets to distribute during the celebrations. It also published a New Testament and the Psalms, translated by Oscar Cocorda.

- **Il Semiatore (new edition)**

In 1908, Lodovico Paschetto founded a paper called “Il Semiatore”, a name already used, but with an emphasis on Protestant proselytism and anti-Catholic polemics; it was circulated also among other Protestant denominations and among Italians abroad. Despite difficult times when publications was suspended, for political reasons during Fascism and for economic reasons during the financial crisis of 1929 and the world wars, the “Semiatore” is still published. Its contents, in consideration of the present-day mitigated religious climate, have naturally considerably changed.



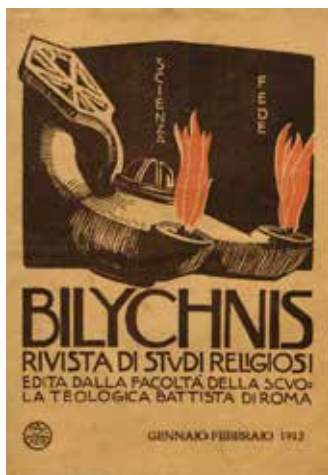
9 Theological training and relationships with Italian culture

- In 1901, the Baptist Theological Seminary was founded in Rome; the first lecturers were G.B. Taylor, Enrico Paschetto Sr., Dexter Whittinghill and ministers from other denominations. They prepared various pastors who were to leave a considerable mark on Baptist life and development. Church members, who numbered about 1,000 in 1885, reached 3,000 on the eve of the First World War, worshipping in 60 communities served by 50 pastors.



Photograph of the Baptist Theological Faculty (Rome 1912-13)

- There was an increased interest in the cultural life of the country and the demands of workers both in industry and agriculture and the dissatisfaction of Catholics involved in the Modernist movement intensified. When Modernism was excommunicated by Pius X (with the encyclical letter *Pascendi Dominici Gregis* in 1907), many priests left the priesthood and some became Baptist ministers, like Mario A. Rossi, Piero Chiminelli and Nicola Macioce.



New editorial projects were introduced with the purpose of establishing contacts with Italian culture and promulgating Protestant thought.

The review “Bilychnis” (the ancient lamp with two lights representing faith and science), launched in 1912 by Lodovico Paschetto and illustrated by the painter and xylographer Paolo Paschetto, published contributions from religious and secular backgrounds and had a wide international appeal. It also published the *Quaderni di Bilychnis* and the *Biblioteca di Studi religiosi* with

publications and pamphlets of considerable merit.

In 1922 the *Bilychnis* publishing house began to print a second review “Conscientia” to “retrace the Italian tradition of religious reform in order to draw conclusions on the present reasons for national renewal”. The problems created by the Fascist regime and the violent attacks of the Catholic press snuffed out the two periodicals: “Conscientia” closed down in 1927 and “Bylichnis” in 1931.

Among the Baptists, figures of great cultural and artistic value emerged: Lodovico Paschetto, director of “Bilychnis”, the philosopher Giuseppe Gangale, editor of “Conscientia” and author of numerous articles, the painter, Paolo Paschetto, member of the church of Via del Teatro Valle in Rome, who frescoed many churches and designed the Coat of Arms of the Italian Republic, Pastors Aristarco Fasulo, Mario A. Rossi, P. Chiminelli, Dexter Whitwinghill, all authors of theological and historical works and lecturers at the Baptist Theological Faculty.



Official Coat of Arms of the Italian Republic designed by Paolo Paschetto in 1948



10 Women's organizations and activities

- In the first decade of the 20th century, the debate on the relationship between evangelization and social progress was particularly significant and led to the opening of new institutions providing welfare and schooling. In October 1912, the Migliarina orphanage for girls was inaugurated in La Spezia, which provided a home for several girls who were orphaned in the devastating earthquake that hit S. Benedetto dei Marsi in 1915.

- In the years following the First World War, the serious crisis profoundly affected above all state education and Baptist churches responded by investing considerable resources in that field. Particularly important was the nursery school in Altamura, which became a point of reference for the whole town.

- In Messina, despite the deeply-rooted prejudices towards Protestants, Sandrina, the wife of Pastor Vincenzo Melodia, together with the teacher Alessandrina M. Riccelli, set up the Protestant Primary School, one of the first schools to open in Messina after the 1908 earthquake, where pupils were taught to read and write free of charge. The school within a few years had three hundred pupils and a Sunday school with over a hundred children.



*Susy Taylor Whittinghill
(1873-1962)*

- From the beginning of the 1930s a lively and intense debate centered on the role of women in Baptist churches in Italy. It was a crucial topic, which posed serious problems and reflected different points of view. Italian society was still far from the topics and problems that would burst on the scene at the end of the 1960s. In the very years in which in the United States women, having obtained the right to vote, continued their struggle to improve the conditions of women working in factories, in Italy it was Susy Whittinghill, daughter and wife of American missionaries, who highlighted and encouraged the recognition of the subordinate position of women in Italian churches, which led to the organization of various women's groups. She wrote letters to pastors'

wives recalling the witness of the early Christian women and proposed starting a movement of Baptist women with the following objectives: *“winning souls for the Lord, learning more about the work of missionaries throughout the world, promoting spirituality through prayer and Bible study, reviving worship and the life of the church, contributing to missionary work in Italy, visiting the sick and the poor.”*



The third Annual Meeting of the Baptist Women held in Rome in 1938

- In March 1933, in the Baptist church in Piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina in Rome, Italian Baptist women held their first meeting. Pastor Asprino Ricci’s welcoming address to the participants was both very encouraging and prophetic: “It is time that Baptist women lead the way to a more arduous task, launching the missionary evangelistic ministry. They must go forwards, come up with new ideas, achieve new heights, and acquire a more fervent spirit for the work in their own churches”. A few years later Mrs Whittinghill left Italy and Miriam Rosa took over the leadership of the women’s movement and despite the difficulties of the period, managed to maintain contacts with the women’s groups scattered throughout the country, thanks to the important role played by the “Testimonio” , the official link between the churches.

11 The churches during the fascist regime

- 1930 was the turning point in the history of Baptist churches in Italy. The mission's report for the year updated the statistics, which listed 2,933 church members, 296 baptisms, and 52 churches. The slump of 1929 and the repression of the Fascist regime in different ways were an obstacle to evangelization and the normal course of church life.

- The policy of the Fascist regime towards Protestant churches up to then was based on two factors: on the one hand the pressure exerted by the Catholic hierarchy to curb or limit religious freedom and evangelization and, on the other, the control exercised by the police. The Lateran Pacts, in 1930, with the appendix of the Law on authorized worship, "*i culti ammessi*", was a stage in this strategy shared by the Vatican and the Fascist regime. The churches found themselves in a two-pronged stranglehold: on the one hand, the clergy fought to limit all forms of public evangelization and to obstruct the work of schools, kindergartens and orphanages, on the other, Fascists obsessively repressed any kind of political opposition or anti-Fascist propaganda. The excuse they made was maintaining public order, but actually, it was an attempt to strangle the growth of churches, which, though, managed to survive the test by isolating themselves.



Lodovico Paschetto (1939)

- The strategy of the mission illustrated by D.G. Whittinghill, G.B. Taylor's successor and the person in charge from 1901, involved gradually handing over the management of the work to the Italians, encouraging the economic and cultural independence of the churches and creating a Baptist identity rooted in the culture of Italian society. From 1920, the missionaries were assisted in the administration of the work by a committee of Italians, among whom Pastor Lodovico Paschetto played a key role.

Whittinghill had high hopes that the responsibility of the work would be handed over to the Italians in 1934, however, the economic crisis of 1929, along with Fascist repression, hampered these projects.

- The repressive policies of the Fascist regime were felt everywhere, but certainly they were more oppressive in the regions south of Rome. In order to be able to function in their churches, ministers had to be officially sanctioned by the Interior Minister and often this recognition was delayed or refused, which hindered their ministry. To open a new church building, it was necessary to obtain government approval, which, if opposed by the local clergy, was practically impossible. If there were disturbances or riots, the churches were closed, as occurred in the particularly serious cases of Gravina and Gioia del Colle, where in 1925 and 1926 the authorities closed two churches on account of protests against the land owners. Finally, three ministers - Liutprando Saccomani from Gioia del Colle, Luigi Loperfido in Matera and Pasquale Russo in Pozzuoli were sent to internal exile for anti-Fascist activity, while Vincenzo Melodia was arrested in May 1939 and sought asylum in the United States until the end of the war.



Luigi Loperfido (1926)



- Despite this, witnessing did not stop and the churches slowly increased despite the losses inflicted.

Group of baptized believers of the Church of Naples, via Foria; in the centre pastor Aprino Ricci (25th May 1927)

12 Churches during the war

- The period of the war was a tragedy for the whole of the country and the consequences were devastating for the small Baptist churches. All ties abroad were suspended and the missionaries had to abandon the country and hand over the management of church work to the Italians. Economic aid to supplement the pastors' stipends and for the non-autonomous churches was no longer available.

The churches had to rely on themselves, in an effort to survive. The overall results, however, were in a certain sense better than could have been expected, because the churches survived the harsh ordeal of the Fascist regime and the war, even though in many cases church work was suppressed or seriously re-dimensioned.

The first and most obvious impact was the slow and inexorable transfer of soldiers to the front. First young men and then, as the conflict continued, the reserves and married men left for the front, emptying the churches.

- In an assembly of the churches held in Rome from 11-13 October 1939, the management of the church work was put in the hands of a committee, chaired by Pastor Ignazio Rivera with Manfredi Ronchi vice-president and Lodovico Paschetto executive secretary. In 1940, three different newsletters invited the churches to make a special effort to meet the pressing needs of the churches. They responded extremely generously and with a spirit of self-sacrifice, making it possible for the work to continue until the end of 1942, even though very precariously. The situation deteriorated in 1943 when the stipends of many pastors were no longer supplemented and in many cases, the churches were unable to provide an indispensable minimum.

The most critical period was when, due to military operations, Italy was divided into two: the committee was even unable to keep in contact by post, "Il Testimonio" was no longer published and many churches were damaged or destroyed during the bombardments. Those most severely hit were Civitavecchia, Genoa, Milan and Ferrara, but there were many badly damaged, also by Fascist gangs. During the war other churches were closed by the Fascist authorities - the most well-known

case was the church of Miglionico (Matera), with an aftermath after the war - above all in Apulia and Sicily.

- The partisan civil war worsened the situation in the north, but contributed to the liberation and moral renewal of the country.

Several Baptists were in various ways involved in the Resistance movement and with the partisans. Lorenzo Palmieri, pastor first at Isola Liri and then at Gioia del Colle, was more than once assaulted by groups of Fascists and Pastor Donato Casteluccio of Bisaccia (Avellino) was imprisoned in 1943 for two months, accused of burning Fascist flags. The most serious cases were those executed by a firing squad in Ferrara, and the partisan martyrs, the Campagni brothers from the church of La Spezia. Leone Garbarino, member of the church of Chiavari, after the 8th of September 1943 was the first to organize a partisan brigade in Liguria.



Leone Garbarino (1882-1953)

- When the war ended on 25th April 1945, the Baptist churches were at the end of their tether. The rallying cry was the only one possible in those tragic circumstances: rebuild from the rubble what had been lost and attempt to relaunch evangelization. The churches had, however, changed and this change had an impact on the next phase.



*Youth fellowship and Sunday school of the Church of Isola del Liri (1930)
In the centre, past. Liutprando Saccomani*

13 Reconstruction, evangelization, Women's and Young People's movements

- The increasing awareness of the importance of the role of women in Baptist churches led to the convening of an assembly of Baptist Women's Missionary Unions in Italy, which was held in the Baptist Church in Borgo Ognissanti in Florence in April 1947 and was attended by 150 women from twenty-eight cities. Gina Bassi was elected national president.



*Second Assembly of the UFMB (Baptist Women's Missionary Unions),
Reggio Calabria, October 1949*

- *An important role was played by the Baptist Institute for women "Betania", located in the suburb of Monte Sacro in Rome, it was built on land bought by the Baptist mission with the objective of creating a Bible school for those families who were unable to provide financial support for the education of their daughters. The Institute "Betania", inaugurated on 2nd October 1950 was directed for twenty years by the American missionary, Virginia Wingo. It was considered to be "the answer to the aspiration of women to grow in the knowledge of Word of the Lord". Some of the women, among them Giulia Nesterini, Maria Ceterelli and Anna Palma, having completed their studies, undertook evange-*

lization in mining towns in Sardinia and Tuscany, where they provided both material and spiritual assistance to the families of the miners. In this missionary spirit, the first groups of women with a social and cultural conscience were organized in the churches.



{Group of women from the Churches of Matera, Gioia del Colle and Miglionico, in the centre, Luigi Loperfido and Liutprando Saccomani (1947)}

- *The post war years were characterized by many new initiatives. In 1952 the first number of the monthly magazine for women “La Lampada” (The Lamp) was published and in 1976 became part of “Il Testimonio”.* For women’s groups it was a means of communication and preparation with its reflections, bible studies, and articles on the role of women in society and in the family, subjects, which, in the light of the Gospel, are still pertinent today. In 1950, thanks to a gift from the Baptist sisters in the United States, a piece of land was purchased in Rocca di Papa, in the hills south of Rome, on which the Baptist Centre was built and then managed by Ada Landi and Anna Veneziano, and from 1953 hosted summer camps for young people. In 1954, the “Villaggio della Gioventu” was built with the help of voluntary workers at Santa Severa, on the Mediterranean coast, to provide churches with a venue where they could meet and appreciate the importance of their identity as a national community.

14 The defense of religious liberty and relations with the state

At the end of the Second World War, Baptists took an active part in the debate on religious freedom both as members of the Federal Council of Protestant churches in Italy, founded in 1946, and with their own publications. In January 1946, Pastor Manfredi Ronchi, President of the Baptist Work, wrote to the National Council of the Christian Democrats (DC) and to the Central Committee of the Socialist Party (PSI), urging the two political parties to put on their agendas the question of religious liberty, which appertained to the parity of duties and rights of all citizens, the liberty to assemble for religious purposes, the liberty to publicize their faith and freedom to worship without interference from the state. Some months later, Ronchi wrote:



Manfredi Ronchi
(1899-1970)

”With the impending (vote) on the Constitution, it is only right that as Protestant Christians, who consider liberty neither as a means to an end, nor as a pretext, but a fundamental requisite in order to serve God sincerely and responsibly, we express our opinion and uphold the principles of religious freedom for all [...].

As Baptists, often persecuted, but never persecutors, we defend and declare [the principles] of religious liberty, our aspiration is that our country, once again a country with a modern constitution, will see religious freedom affirmed in the fundamental charter of its new Constitution. Without reservations or restrictions” (Manfredi Ronchi, In the impending Constituent Assembly, “Il Testimonio”, no. 7-8, April- May 1946))

Despite being disappointed by the inclusion of the 1929 concordat in article 7 of the Constitution, Baptist churches, together with Waldensians and Methodists, continued to call the attention of the Italian Government to the need to apply what was foreseen in article 8, in order to discipline, in compliance with this norm, the relations between the State and Protestant churches.

In 1974, Pastor Piero Bensi, President of the Baptist Union, wrote

to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Internal Affairs and to the Presidents of the Lower House and the Senate asking that the law on authorized worship, “i culti ammessi”, be rescinded and that the Agreement between the State and minority religious bodies as provided for in article 8 (of the Constitution) be signed. In February 1977, delegates from local churches, at a meeting organized by the Executive Committee of the Baptist Union (UCEBI) to discuss relations between the State and churches, voted with a large majority in favour of the opportuneness of stipulating an Agreement which would guarantee religious liberty, revoking the legislation on “authorized worship”.

At the 1980 General Assembly, the debate on the issue of relations with the jurisdiction of the state concluded with the approval of a proposal, which invited the Executive Committee to verify scrupulously the substance of an eventual agreement and eschew any privileges. Two years later the General Assembly approved a proposal that gave the Executive Committee a mandate to nominate a commission, which, having carefully examined the question, prepared a well-structured guideline for the Agreement that was then sent to the churches, which passionately debated the question.

As it was essential to continue the discussion within the churches, it was decided to convene an ad hoc Assembly in September 1985, which gave the UCEBI President, Paolo Spanu, a mandate to commence negotiations in order to reach an Agreement. After extenuating negotiations, in March 1993 the Agreement was signed by the Prime Minister, the Hon. Giuliano Amato, and the President of the Baptist Union (UCEBI), Pastor Franco Scaramuccia.

“Since 1863 we have been present in Italy, and since then have awaited [.....] recognition of our churches, today with the application in our regards of the pluralistic view of the relations between state and church as defined by the “Constituent Assembly” [.....]. We are concerned about the difficult situation our country is going through [...], The role of the Church of Christ, which is other, and separate from that of the State, implies pursuing its own mission, sometimes in accord with State legislation, sometimes in disagreement with its degenerations, which limit freedom and corrupt justice“ (From the speech by UCEBI President when the Agreement was signed on 20 March 1993).

Franco Scaramuccia
(1938-2007)



15 The period following the Second World War

- **Missionary work is consolidated**

1938 saw the arrival of the new director of the Mission, William D. Moore. At the outbreak of war, he returned to the States, returning to Italy in 1945. With the post war revival, many American missionaries arrived and large amounts of money became available to finance the work in Italy.

- **The purchase of new buildings**

The Taylor Institute at Centocelle on the outskirts of Rome was enlarged and used as an orphanage and a residence for the elderly. Villa Colla in Rivoli (Turin) was bought to set up a theological seminary and The Bible School for girls, 'Betania' was founded in Monte Sacro, Rome. Other centres were opened, the young people's 'Villaggio della Gioventu' in S. Severa, the Centre for children in Rocca di Papa' and the Old People's Home "Villa Grazialma" in Avigliana (Turin).

- **Publications**

At the same time, the Baptist Publishing House was established, publishing educational material and magazines, mainly for children, young people and women's groups. In 1953 a theological publication, "The Interpreter of the Bible" was launched. However, a few years later only "Il Testimonio" ("Messaggero evangelico") and "Il Seminatore" survived.



Manfredi Ronchi (left), Ernesto Corsani (standing) and Piero Bensi (right) during a pastoral meeting (Baptist Church of piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina, Rome, 23th September 1954)

- **UCEBI**

In 1956, the Protestant Baptist Work, inaugurated in 1923, became the Christian Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy (UCEBI), and gradu-

ally achieved its independence. One of the most important ministers in this period was Pastor Manfredi Ronchi, first secretary and then President of the Union. Ronchi was also President of the European Baptist Federation (1954-56).

- **Growth in numbers**

The evangelistic campaigns resulted in an increase in church membership: numbers increased from 3,600 in 1947 to 4,700 in 1962, to which were added 500 from the AMEI, founded in 1952 by Enrico Paschetto Jr., from the churches of the La Spezia mission, which joined the UCEBI in 1964.



*Enrico Paschetto jr.
(1910-1987)*

- **The student protest**

In the 1960s, many young people from Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian churches took part in the Students' Protest Movement and in workers' struggles, trying to involve the churches in a political commitment. This caused a rift between those who wanted only the preaching of the Gospel and those who proposed social commitment.

In 1969, some young Baptists presented a document with the title: "The Meaning of Our Faith", which sparked a lively debate and marked the beginning of the breach with the American Baptist Mission. (Foreign Mission Board).

UCEBI General Assembly in Santa Severa, 1969

From left to right, Manfredi Ronchi, Carmelo Mollica, Bruno Saccomani, Paolo Sanfilippo



16 From the 1970s to the 1980s: towards an independent Baptist Union

- **The post 1968 crisis**

The years following the events of 1960 were marked by the confrontation between two trends within Italian Baptism, represented by those who wanted to proclaim the Gospel in the context of social struggles and those who wanted a total separation between faith and politics. The 1974 General Assembly, which inaugurated Pastor Piero Bensi's presidency (1974-1984), began to lay the basis for overcoming the fracture that had been created.

In the meantime, drastic changes in society, on a political, social and ethical level had a strong impact on the churches, which, though, was not matched by an adequate historical and theological reflection.



Piero Bensi

- **Rethinking the Union**

The decline in membership led Baptist churches to further collaboration with Waldensian and Methodists and to rethinking the structure of the Union, with local communities assuming more responsibility. In 1970 the Elders' Committee (Collegio degli Anziani) was created to resolve issues within the Union and, in 1978, the Department of Theology, for the support of the various ministries in the churches, and that of Evangelization, to relaunch Baptist witness.

- **The End of Co-operation with the American Mission**

In 1978, the General Assembly approved a document prepared in accord with the American Mission, which, after more than a hundred years, marked the conclusion of the presence of the Southern Baptist Convention in Italian Baptist Churches.

Paolo Spanu

- **The Cooperation Plan**

During the presidency of Paolo Spanu (1984-1990), the 1986 Assembly approved the "Cooperation Plan", a pact between the



churches which placed the traditional Baptist view of the autonomy of local churches and their financial independence alongside the principle of reciprocal solidarity in the financial support of the whole Union and in the collective support of its ministers.

- **The Confession of Faith**

The General Assembly of 1990 approved a Confession of Faith, the first to be drawn up in the history of Italian Baptists.

The Preamble - *The Churches, which in Italy arose from the preaching of Baptists in the wake of the political unification of Italy and those, which in the course of time have forged a bond with them, now acknowledge each other in communion within the Christian Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy (UCEBI). Historically they belong to the tradition which dates back to the Church of the apostles and over the ages have considered it important to reaffirm the faith of the early Church as expressed in Scripture, in the terms of the renewal of the Spirit (in The Middle Ages), of the Reformation (in the sixteenth and seventh centuries) and in missionary endeavours (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). They declare their intention of committing themselves to the discipleship of Christ, in the clarity of their identity of faith and in the search for discerning ways of witnessing and thus affirm their desire to express this bond, both in practical co-operation and with the following confession of faith.*

Art 1. Sola Gratia. *God accomplishes his work of creation, of judgement and of the salvation of the world and of every individual, by His grace alone.*

Art. 2 Solus Christus. *God the Father accomplishes His work by means of His only Son Jesus Christ, Word made man, crucified for the sins of humankind, risen for the justification of believers, Lord and Saviour of the world.*

Art. 3 Sola Scriptura *The Bible is the only authentic and normative witness of God's work through Jesus Christ. In as much as the Spirit renders it Word of God, it is to be studied, honoured and obeyed.*

Art. 4 Human nature *Humankind, estranged from God and divided among itself, can do nothing nor hope for its own salvation; God alone, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, accomplishes through grace the salvation of humankind and of the world.*

Art. 5 Sola Fide. *The word of God, incarnated in Jesus Christ, testified in the Bible and announced in the preaching of the Gospel, can be received by faith alone. As sinners, humankind is justified and reconciled by faith, through repentance.*

17 The ministry of women

- If women are “half the church” their exclusion from the ministry means the exclusion of half the church from its mission. If women are really *imago dei* and humankind is male and female, the exclusion of women from the ministry means that neither the real image of God, nor real humankind are represented in the symbolic order by a ministry, which is exclusively male. In the early church, the two contrasting traditions were already apparent: the first open-minded, the second dogmatic. The latter prevailed in the history of Christianity and not even the Reformation immediately altered the situation.

- In Baptist churches, as in many other denominations, the role of women was and still is a controversial subject. The early Baptist communities were formed at a time in which women were considered inferior to men, both in social life and in the family circle. The long road towards the recognition of complete parity ended only during the twentieth century with the ordination of women pastors. In England Violet Hedger was the first woman to be accepted in a Baptist seminary and in 1926 was inducted as minister. In the United States, the beginnings of the ministry of women go back to the middle of the nineteenth century with the ordination of Addie E. Davis in the Southern Baptist Convention and to Trudie Trimm in the National Baptist Convention.

- In Italy, the Waldensians ordained the first woman in 1967 and in 1976, the Baptist missionary Mary Lou Moore was appointed “assistant minister” in the churches of Gravina di Puglia and Altamura. An intense debate followed in the churches and led in 1982 to the General Assembly’s declaration in favour of women pastors.

Pastor Anna Maffei was the first woman to be president of the UCEBI (2004-2010). Now a third of the pastors in Italian Baptist Churches are women. The contribution they make to theological discussion, gender studies, to ser-

Mary Lou Moore



vice in the church and to ecumenism is extremely productive and full of promise for the future.

- Protestant churches which recognize the ministry of ordained women have discovered that it has immensely benefitted the churches and that the ministry itself has changed, modelling itself less on an authoritarian approach and more on an inclusive one, based on cooperation and parity which benefit the whole church.

With the ministry of women, its prophetic dimension today acquires its real dimension. This prophetic aspect judges the whole ministry of the church, it transforms it and offers a word of hope to all Christian churches for the construction of a church that becomes an assembly of equals, in accordance with Paul's affirmation in his letter to the Galatians: "There is neither male or female, because you are all one in Christ" (Gal. 3:28), and overcomes both past and present prejudices, based on gender.

Anna Maffei



Elisabeth Green



Silvia Rapisarda



Paola Zambon



Gabriela Lio



Ana Rosa Pereira



Cristina Arcidiacono



Helene Fontana



18 The Protestant Federation and ecumenical relationships

- **FCEI**

The relationship with “historical” Protestants becomes closer. In the wake of the Second Protestant Congress (Rome 1965), in 1967 the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI) was founded with Waldensians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans and the Salvation Army. Baptist ministers Piero Bensi (1976-82), Domenico Tomasetto (1994-2000) and the current president Luca Maria Negro have been FCEI Presidents.



- **BMV**

During Pastor Bensi’s presidency, the meetings between Baptists, Methodists and Waldensians (BMV) increased. A Synod-Assembly (Rome 1990) recognized each denomination’s ministers and church members. Baptists, while not acknowledging infant baptism received other believers in full communion. Pastors, irrespective of their denomination, minister in neighbouring churches. A joint Assembly- Synod is convened every five years.



Baptist Assembly-Waldensian-Methodist Synod (Torre Pellice, August 2000). The Waldensian pastor Franco Giampiccoli greets Baptist minister Massimo Aprile, beside him is Renato Maiocchi (outgoing UCEBI president) with pastors Martin Ibarra, Erminio Podestà and Lidia Giorgi

- In 1992 the weekly paper “Riforma” was first published and replaced previous periodicals of the BMV churches. UCEBI is member of the Protestant Publishing Society (Riforma) and of the Claudiana Publishers.

- **International relations**

At an international level UCEBI is a member of the World Council of Churches (WCC), of the Conference of European Churches (KEK) and of the European Baptist Federation (EBF). In the nineties contacts were resumed with the Baptist Missionary Society which has sent pastors to Italy and contacts were made with Baptists in Virginia (USA), who sent the first American missionaries to Italy in the nineteenth century. Relations have also been established with the Lott Carey convention, an Afro-American mission that helped to organize a conference on Martin Luther King. The Italian Baptist Union has also twinned with Baptists in Zimbabwe.

- **Relations with Catholicism**

The first official meetings with the Roman Catholic Church began following the Second Vatican Council. In 1989 the UCEBI organized an important conference on Ecumenism with leaders from other Protestant churches and key figures from the Catholic Church, among them Maria Vingiani, founder of the Secretariat for Ecumenical Activity (SAE), a lay organization which brings together members from various religious bodies. In 2009 Cardinal Angelo Bagnasco, President of CEI and Pastor Anna Maffei, UCEBI President (2004-2010) signed the Joint document for the pastoral guidelines of marriages between Catholics and Baptists, which does away with various obligations on the non-Catholic partner.



In January 2011 Huw Anderson, then minister of the Baptist Church in Matera, took part in the ecumenical vigil in the Sanctuary of S. Maria delle Grazie during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, together with Monsignor Michele Castoro Archbishop of Manfredonia, Vieste and S. Giovanni Rotondo, and Georgios Antonopoulos, Archimandrite of the Greek Orthodox Church of Naples

19 Baptist Churches in Italy today

- **The Agreement with the State**

At the beginning of the 1990s the Italian Government submitted a proposal to UCEBI for an Agreement with the State based on article 8 of the Constitution. The extraordinary Assembly held in February 1993 accepted the recommendation, but decided not to benefit from money available from tax returns (the so-called 8 per thousand, OPM). The Agreement was signed on 29th March 1993 by the Prime Minister, Giuliano Amato, and the UCEBI President Franco Scaramuccia. The preparatory consultations were chaired by the magistrate Aldo Campenni, member of the Teatro Valle Baptist Church in Rome, who also re-drafted UCEBI regulations. On 16 July 2010, following a decision of the General Assembly in 2008, Anna Maffei, President of the Baptist Union, signed an addendum to the Agreement making it possible to accede to funds from the OPM.

- **Financial problems**

In recent years, even though each church (complying to the Plan of Cooperation) has made over most of its revenue to the Union for general expenses, the maintenance of pastors and joint activities, these contributions, added to the sums from rented property, have not been sufficient to cover current expenses. This has entailed the sale of some of the properties that were given to UCEBI by the American Mission in 1993.

- **Italian Baptists and foreign Baptists**

The number of foreign Protestants in the Baptist Union has increased, either because they have joined our churches, or because already established communities have become part of the Italian Baptist family. Immigrants now make up 40% of the Baptists in Italy and a Department of International Churches has been set up to further the process of integration and to deal with related multicultural issues.

- **Liturgical renewal**

In 2001 to meet a strongly felt need in the churches for the renewal of our liturgy, a deacon for music and liturgy, in the person of Carlo Lella, was appointed. In 2007, Lella was also given the task of run-

ning the “Scuola Asaf”, which offers training to those involved in worship. Since 2012 the New Scuola Asaf oversees new ministries for mission, preaching, music and intercultural activities and has also prepared a new hymn book with 350 hymns from various parts of the world.



Conference “Memory and Mission” (Chianciano, 25-27/11/2011) From left to right, Domenico Tomasetto (former FCEI President), Renato Maiocchi (former UCEBI President), Gianna Urizio, Salvatore Rapisarda, Aldo Casonato (former UCEBI President), Emmanuele Paschetto



Ivano De Gasperis and Antonella Scuderi, pastors of the Baptist Church of Rome Trastevere



Former President, Raffaele Volpe with some of UCEBI office staff



Events in the History of Baptists in Italy

- 1863:** arrival in Italy of the first Baptist ministers from England, Edward Clarke (1820-1912) and James Wall
- 1866:** beginning of the *Spezia Mission for Italy and the Levant*, founded by Edward Clarke, who was first assisted in the leadership of the mission and then substituted by Arrigo Erberto Pullen,
- 1870:** arrival in Rome of the missionary William Nelson Cote of the *Southern Baptist Convention*.
- 1871:** the *Northern Baptist Convention* sends its own missionary, William C. Van Meter, to Italy.
- 1873:** Cote is replaced by George B. Taylor (1832-1907),
- 1875:** William K. Landels (1854 -1926) from the *English Baptist Missionary Society* arrives in Italy.
- 1876:** first issue of the review “Il Seminatore” which will be published until 1882
- 1884:** publication of “Il Testimonio”, the official organ of the Christian Apostolic Baptist Union, which from that year unites all the Baptist organizations in Italy.
- 1901:** the Baptist Theological Seminary is established, which with various interruptions will function until the 1970s.
- 1908:** “Il Seminatore” is once again published for evangelization purposes and is still in print.
- 1912:** the review “Bilychnis” is published.
- 1913:** the orphanage for girls is opened in La Spezia.

- 1922:** the review “Conscientia” is founded.
- 1923:** the G.B Taylor orphanage for boys is opened in Rome, later it will become a Home for the Elderly.
- 1929:** “Regulations for authorized worship “cult ammessi” in the State” (24 June 1929, n. 1159)
- 1933:** meeting in Rome of Baptist women who, in 1947, founded the Baptist Women’s Missionary Union.
- 1946:** Baptists are among the founders of the Federal Council of Protestant Churches.
- 1956:** Christian Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy (UCEBI) is established with its own statute, independently from the American Mission, and with its own accountability.
- 1961:** acknowledgement of the legal status of the Ente Patrimoniale (the body dealing with endowments) of the UCEBI (DPR 20 January 1961, n. 19)
- 1966:** the churches which are part of the *Spezia Mission join the Baptist Union.*
- 1968:** UCEBI participates in the creating the Federation of Protestant Churches in Italy (FCEI).
- 1969:** Young Baptists, Waldensians and Methodists found the Federation of Evangelical Youth in Italy (FGEI).
- 1976:** birth of the Federation of Evangelical Women in Italy (FDEI), the Baptist Women’s Union is one of the founders.
- 1978:** UCEBI and the American Mission agree to the gradual disengagement of the latter in Italy.
- 1982:** the Assembly of UCEBI votes in favour of the ministry of women.

- 1986:** pact between the Churches and the Cooperation Plan
- 1990:** (2- 4 November): first session of the joint General Assembly of the Baptist Union and the Synod of Waldensian and Methodist Churches; “Document of reciprocal recognition between Baptist, Methodist and Waldensian Churches in Italy”.
- 1990:** UCEBI Assembly approves the Confession of Faith.
- 1993:** the American Baptist Mission donates to the Ente Patrimoniale all its properties in Italy.
- 1993:** the *Baptist Missionary Society* begins its cooperation with the UCEBI.
- 1993:** UCEBI President and the Prime Minister of Italy sign the Agreement, it will be ratified by Parliament with Bill n . 116 on 12th April 1995.
- 2004:** election of Anna Maffei, the first woman to be president of the UCEBI.
- 2007:** the Scuola Asaf for music, liturgy and various ministries is inaugurated.
- 2010:** (Chianciano, 1st November) Pastor Raffaele Volpe is elected President of UCEBI
- 2016:** (Chianciano, 1st November) Giovanni Paolo Arcidiacono is elected President of UCEBI

~~Is the Word of God, incarnated Jesus Christ, whose blood nourished a huge tree . In the two thousand years since His death and resurrection various branches have grown on the trunk of this tree which voiced in different ways their understanding the way they lived the Christian faith.~~

~~From the great branch of Protestantism, formed from the graft of the Reformation, various offshoots have grown, among them Baptism: this took place at the beginning of the seventeenth century thanks to the meeting of two important events which gave life to that branch: the anabaptism in continental Europe, part of the radical wing of the reformation, and the English separatist puritanism, a movement formed by small communities of believers who separated from the Church of England and who dissented with the ecclesiology of Puritanism. From this secondary branch originated gems which brought forth lasting fruit:~~



€ 8,00

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