



The missionary vision in the Italian Evangelical Church starting from the Unity of Italy to the present day

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PREFACE

I would like to thank all those who helped me with suggestions, criticisms and observations: I would like to thank them, though I am the one responsible for every mistake contained in this research.

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Thanks to friends and fraternal friends who have encouraged and supported me in my studies, even financially, or those who have spent part of their time discussing with me how best to do this work.

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DECLARATION

I, Vincenzo Paci, declare that the dissertation hereby submitted to the North West University for the degree Magister Theologia has not been previously submitted by me for a degree at any other university; that it is my own work in design and execution, and that all material contained therein has been duly acknowledged.

ABSTRACT

This research explores the development of the Pentecostal Protestant Churches in Italy from the time of the Unification of Italy.

Italy is a predominantly Roman Catholic country, strengthened by the fact that the main centre of Catholicism, the Holy See, is situated in the very heart of the country. Throughout the years the Protestantism has been struggling to gain a foothold among the people.

In 1170, the first non-Catholic church, the Waldensians were established. They remained a small group but did have an influence on the spread of Protestantism. Various influences from other countries, as missionaries came into the country established other churches.

The Counter Revolution and the way the Catholic Church resisted this development is discussed. Much detail is given to the various Laws, Papers, Statutes and Proclamations used by the government to counter the spread of these non-Catholic churches.

The various Projects developed by the Pentecostals are explained and the state of the Church today is explored.

Key terms:

Vision, Mission, Pentecostal, Catholicism, Religious freedom, Training, Immigration, Evangelical Church.

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CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background and problem statement

The reasons that inspired this research are all reducible to the theme of the mission or evangelisation in the Italian Evangelical Church (IEC). Italy is a nation with a history that goes back to the first centuries of the Christian era, although much of it is of Roman Catholic origin, which is influenced by many different cultures from all continents of the world, all of which have left a mark and contributed to make the nation what it is now. For this reason, and within this context, the evangelical church witness ministry needs to find a place and a way of co-operation, proposing new methodological and relational instruments. Special attention needs to be given to the generational and international changes which have left a mark on the existence of all countries, including Italy. It is necessary, therefore, to begin with a historical journey, to analyse the missiological principles applied by the IEC in the current context and to evaluate successes and failures in order to provide new guidelines and actions to be better equipped to reach the modern-day generation in view of the "glocal" (global and local) challenges.

1.1.1 Problem statement

This research is within the field of Missiology, an interest resulting from the researcher's personal experience of being president of a Missionary Agency, and also from the realisation of some challenges that in general explain the reasons of the partial failure of the missionary work. The object of this affirmation comes from a time during which it could verify how the Christian mission, first in the Catholic environment, then in the protestant/evangelical church, applied models that, in some cases, were in conflict with the biblical principles and the example of Jesus himself. It is also important to investigate the way the gospel was transmitted, if there has been a cultural and denominational legacy that has had a pre-eminent role in the missionary activity in the IEC. Moreover, it is essential to consider other issues like the role of missionary organisations and their relationships with the ecclesiastical institutions, as often these relationships resulted in forms of competition for church members who left the formal churches for a mission outreach. Therefore, it is deemed necessary to analyse the past mission pattern in the IEC, and where possible, offer a new paradigm which takes into account successes and failures. The study will further analyse the actual needs and perspectives involving the whole IEC. This research is in agreement with those who see the need for a "Missional Church" centred on the preaching of the Gospel.

1.1.2 Research questions

The main research question of this study is: What were the difficulties and the influences encountered in dialogue with the diverse and complex evangelical world by IEC in developing missionary / evangelistic work, in the development of the missionary vision of the IEC? To answer the above question properly attention will be given to the following research questions:

- a) What is meant by "*missio Dei*" from a pneumatological perspective?
- b) What can be learned from the mission history in Italy of the XXth century about factors that prevent Christians to evangelize their own country?
- c) How do churches and missionary organisations collaborate, within the degree of religious freedom in Italy?
- d) Do churches and missionary organisations provide sufficient training for a new context?

1.2 Aim and Objectives

The aim of this study is: To analyse the dialogue within the diverse and complex evangelical world and to describe the influence of mission organisations on the development of a new missionary vision of the IEC.

To reach this aim the following objectives need to be attend to:

- The concept of "*missio Dei*" from a pneumatological perspective;
- A historical overview of the difficulties encountered by the IEC mission, in developing missionary/evangelistic work in Italy during the last century;
- The problem of religious freedom in Italy and the collaboration of the IEC with missionary organizations;
- The mission vision of the IEC and missionary organisations with regard to the training and service within a new context;

1.3 Methodology, rationale and research design

The research is a literature study touching on various issues regarding the Italian Church and its mission.

The materials obtained are restricted to the religious environment. Also, secular literature on the Evangelicals in Italy is scarce. The Evangelicals are considered to be a small phenomenon and the number of populations involved in it are exiguous. The texts used as reference, can be found at the local Christian Bookshop, and also at the National Catholic Press as can be deduced from the bibliography. Some of the quotes have been obtained from the Internet as can be seen in the footnotes. Surveys of non-denominational nature are employed. However, those will be referred to as fountains of historical information on the dawn of the Evangelical Church in Italy. To trace out the progress of the story, some of the Italian Waldensian Church documents are examined, as well as others from the A.D.I (Italian Assembly of God).

Beginning with the first years of the last century, besides the testimony of national churches and foreign denominations already present in Italy, there was the successful witness of Italian emigrants coming back from the United States as first representatives of the Pentecostal Movement (Introvigne, 2004:47). They promoted an incisive and constant missionary action. The study then moves on, to the present day, giving due attention to the sociological and religious context, in constant evolution, because of important recent changes. Therefore, the core of the research is the evaluation of the missionary action in the Italian frame of reference. The heart of the Apostolic Roman Catholicism and the challenge that the Italian Evangelicals, a strong minority, are daily facing, for example, are the problems while preaching the Gospel to distinguishing themselves from the Catholics. There is still a component which has always tried to crush the protestant identity. Today, the relation between the State and the Evangelical Church is still founded in the 1929 old fascist laws which "promoted" the Evangelicals from being "tolerated" to being "admitted." This is all the Protestants could get. Such a position greatly affects the Evangelical circles in Italy as, for example, equal opportunities, media access, and the weight of some specific proposals in the political field. It is in this context that the researcher considers it necessary to rethink the task of the Italian Christian mission.

The aspect of missionary training as a study and acquisition of the biblical and theological elements that allow candidates for missionary service to carry out effective work is to a certain extent absent in Italy. The lack of this ingredient is causing conflicts and affecting a balanced growth in the missionary vocation, both in the church and in the individuals. Such training should help to express to the maximum a vocation at its best according to its abilities, together with the work of the Spirit. The majority of Evangelicals in Italy, about 80%, are represented by Pentecostals, who until very recently lacked academic structures to turn to and with obvious foreseeable formative shortcomings. The remaining 20% is represented by the historical churches, Waldensians, Baptists and Methodists that have long benefited from a theological faculty to which pastors are sent for education and training. Consequently, professional structures

and profiles are urgently needed to promote such a service in order to increase the level of knowledge, thus producing a very welcome change of *forma mentis*. The research seeks to analyse the dialogue within the diverse and complex evangelical world. There is very little ecumenical openness and less openness to the Catholic world (Heussi & Miegge, 1984:229). There are a considerable number of denominational churches and a good number of small/medium independent churches and foreign or local missionary associations that work in this country. A portion of the work will be committed to the “new context” of the migratory flows (Newbigin, 1995:191) with Italy at the centre of the debate since it represents one of the few open gates for the migrants to enter and reach Europe. It will describe the missionary action especially in the South of Italy, for example in Sicily, where there is a relevant presence of migrants often causing problems. The churches are challenged to a religious and sociological confrontation with other cultures, but are not always prepared to respond to a human global emergency.

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1.4 Ethical considerations

As a comparative literature study, this study is viewed as a low risk study without any direct or indirect ethical implications for any individuals. The ethical guidelines of the NWU will be followed and an ethical clearance certificate has been obtained.

1.5 Concept clarification

- Vision: indicates the projection of a future scenario that reflects the ideals, values and aspirations, sets goals and encourages action.
- Mission: is the "manifest" of the mission, tends to focus more on the present and to provide operational guidance.
- Pentecostal: Pentecostalism or Pentecostal movement is a group of Protestant Christian denominations and churches, which developed in the second half of the nineteenth century.
- Catholicism: religious confession that most of the Italians belong to and which has always strongly influenced public and private life in Italy
- Religious freedom: freedom of a person to change religion or not to profess to any religion, to manifest it in teaching, in practice, in adoration and observance, without restriction or retaliation by constituted authorities, while retaining the same rights as citizens who have a different faith. It also includes the right for religious groups to testify and spread their message to society without being subjected to contempt or persecution.

- Training: the activity of teaching new skills and knowledge.
- Immigration: the permanent or temporary transfer of individuals or groups of people to a country or place other than their country of origin.
- Italian Evangelical Church: all churches, those belonging to the historical churches, Waldensians, Baptists and Methodists and those belonging to the area of "awakening": Pentecostals and autonomous churches.

1.6 Provisional classification of chapters

- Chapter 1 - Introduction
The line of thought that will be followed to talk about the mission of the church in Italy
- Chapter 2 - The meaning of "mission"
Rediscovering the concept of *missio Dei* in the frame of the action of the Holy Spirit
- Chapter 3 – A historical overview of the evangelical and missionary presence in Italy
The core of the research is the evaluation of the missionary action in the Italian frame of reference.
The factors that prevent the evangelical action in the IEC
Difficulties and developments in the last century.
- Chapter 4 - Religious freedom and collaboration between churches and missionary organisations in Italy
The persecution of the Pentecostal movement and the fight for the principle of "religious liberty".
Collaboration between churches and missionary organisations in Italy.
- Chapter 5 – Mission within a new context
Training is mission.
The road to mission training in an anti-educational environment.
Mission and immigration
Conclusion: a way forward
- Chapter 6 –Recapitulating

CHAPTER 2 THE *MISSIO DEI*: A PNEUMATOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

2.1 Preface

The term “missiological” has increasingly become an object of research by those who study and are actively involved in missions or in similar areas of ministry. This is one of the aspects used to deepen the understanding of the term “missiological”. The missionary practical background has important repercussions on the present IEC situation to the point that it becomes a determining and discriminant factor in choosing evangelistic and mission strategies. Bevans & Schoeder (2010:31) affirm that attempting to define mission might be difficult and the best way to do it is by affirming that it moves the Church beyond herself in history, in culture and in the lives of people, inviting them to cross the borders. Examining the meaning of Mission for our time, due consideration should be given to the context in which we live, and which is quite different from that when Matthew, Luke and Paul wrote their books. It is, therefore, useless to try to connect with and apply the words of the New Testament writers directly to our situation in a direct correspondence (Bosch, 2000:257 ff.). A similar criterion should be applied to what Jesus said to His disciples (Matthew 26:19-20). It is like the tip of an iceberg which hides a vast immersed continent. Our duty, therefore, is to rediscover and spread around the wonderful value of doing mission so that others might find their salvation. Christ’s words gave courage and determination to the disciples and they, with their own resources, did bring the Good News to last till the end of the world.

An account must be given to the origin of Mission, referring specifically to the *missio Dei* as a primary concept rediscovered and applied to today’s missiological contexts with all the imaginable applications. The goal of this chapter is to study the *missio Dei* from a pneumatological perspective. During this process some of the weaknesses of the missionary action in the IEC, as well as possible practical solutions, will be discussed. Due to the continuing evolution of the global situation, these results should not be considered definitive.

2.2 Rediscovering the concept of *missio Dei*¹ in the Holy Spirit’s action frame

Nowadays, it is quite complicated to address the missionary question. Worldwide historical as well as political events witness a global disorder and a critical situation, especially in terms of ethical and moral values. In such a context, Christians are called to proclaim Christ to the nations

¹ As a modern missiological concept, *missio Dei* goes back to Karl Barth’s work, written in the 1930s. It was introduced for the first time, in the International Missionary Conference (IMC) in Wellington, in 1952 by K. Hartenstein, director of the Basel Mission. Nevertheless, the *missio Dei* idea did not become prevalent until the 1990s.

through the Gospel of Jesus Christ (The Good News) and the indispensable help of the Holy Spirit, the only One who can convince people of the necessity of a radical change (John 16:7-11) (Sunquist, 2013:220). Mission is essentially founded on Christology which is together the work of the Holy Spirit with Christ's Salvation. The Holy Scripture lists a variety of the Holy Spirit's roles related to Mission, underlying Christ's lasting presence. Consequently, by the Holy Spirit, we participate in the Mission. This becomes a Christian strong testimony, unceasingly proclaiming God's saving power in Jesus Christ while constantly affirming God's dynamic involvement by the Holy Spirit. Though God uses people to reach other people, this is not a kind of self-realisation. Emphasis is posed on the Holy Spirit; it is He who directs and grants power to the Christian Mission. The Holy Spirit is God's gift to the Church in His Mission (Sunquist, 2013:218).

In the Book of Acts the Holy Spirit is mentioned for a total of fifty-nine times. This means that Luke deemed it important to underline the Holy Spirit's work, since the Book of Acts is the testimony of the Missionary meetings in the power of the Spirit (Acts 13:2). He gives action power to the Church's missionary ministry (Sunquist, 2013:219). It is, therefore, impossible to separate the Church from Mission; their relationship being so intimate. The Holy Spirit gave to the Church life and the capacity to fulfil her task to go into the world. The Church, therefore, exists for Mission and if she does not carry out her mission, will cease to be the Church (Together towards Life 2012: 21-22, 57).

Giving due consideration to what has already been said about the Holy Spirit and His efficient action, the Missionary work, generally speaking, should not record any loss. However, in reality and in practice, it is not so. Through the centuries, human mistakes have continuously been made (Bosch, 2000:313-323), causing distress, fights, misunderstandings and the consequent rejection of the message of salvation addressed to non-Christians. It is, therefore, necessary, for the IEC, to analyse the "Mission" theme by looking at the context in which she lives. In a certain way, *missio Dei* compels the IEC to take a step back to (re)discover, unexpectedly, that God has always been a missionary God and has always been involved in mission also in the IEC! In fact, reflecting on the people of Israel, Mission has always been deeply rooted in the Old Testament in their way of living. Referring to Israel, in the Hebrew Bible a specific terminology is used to distinguish them as "the people of God" from the other people, defined negatively as pagans (Bevans & Schoeder, 2010:36). Others do affirm that, besides the negative attitude, Israel shows a clear tendency to assume a positive role, a saving one, towards other nations (Sievernich, 2012:17-18).

The Bible itself affirms that "in Israel all the nations of the earth will be blessed" (Genesis 12:3; Isaiah 45:1-8; 49:1-6). Israel, then, becomes the dispenser of God's blessings for all the nations and his conversion (in case of apostasy) will have universal repercussions since "the nations will bless themselves in Him" (Jeremiah 4:2; Isaiah 19:23).

It is noteworthy that God entrusted Israel with the task of the redemption of the world. Such election did not grant them any privilege but, rather, it was a service to the world. Israel had to be a “light to the nations” (Isaiah 42:6; cf. 40:1-3) and a “city set on a hill” (Matthew 5:14; cf. Isaiah 2:2-4). Israel’s way of living had to testify to God’s redemptive actions in order to make redemption accessible to all. Their election had to bring God’s good news to all the nations; it had to be a service and not a privilege. Israel, unfortunately, built walls to keep nations out and not bridges to bring them in (Amos 9:7; Is 19:24).² The ancient Old Testament idea that Israel was unique amidst all nations proved to be wrong (Wright, 2006:83-85). God, indeed, controls the history of all the nations and not only of the Covenant people. He even uses nations as agents of his judgment on Israel (Is 41:2-4; 25:44-45; 44:28; 45:6). Israel’s knowledge of God had to be proclaimed to all the nations as good news, the same as his liberation which had to be a blessing to all the nations. The book of Exodus tells about God’s power as well as his love towards his people. God promised to do great things on Israel’s behalf, as for example: 1) Setting them free from the Egyptians; 2) making a covenant with them; 3) giving them the land (Wright, 2006:75-76). But, sadly, being at the centre of God’s will, the people of Israel developed a sense of uniqueness and, since his plan had to be accomplished, the temptation to exploit God’s will was rife (Wright, 2006:92). Actually, Israel did not live in splendid isolation but in relation to other nations. Canaan is at the crossroads among three continents so that she could not go unnoticed. The neighbouring nations, called to make a radical and ethical choice, witnessed the development of Ancient history, of the mighty redemptive acts of God (Wright, 2006: 467-470). Consequently, if Israel wants to be an instrument of God’s blessings to other nations, they should cooperate with God’s plans, whether they like it or not (Wright, 2006:90). The subsequent inclusion of the Gentiles showed the real motivation of Israel’s existence: to accomplish God’s will which God promised to Abram. Similarly, Jesus the Messiah of Israel, embodies Israel’s mission and identity (Gal 3:29). Mission, ultimately, has its origin in God’s heart. This is the deepest source of love creating Mission. As Bosch (2000:540) affirms, “there is Mission because God loves people”. Before coming to such a conclusion, it is useful to take a look back. In the past, Mission was interpreted differently. The variety of interpretations produced various patterns (paradigms) within which the Church acted. For example, soteriologically the question was “how to save people from their state of corruption”; culturally, “how to introduce the rest of the world into the blessings of Western Christianity” and, territorially, “how did the Church enlarge her border” (Bosch, 2000:538 ff.).

² Gelder, V. & Craig. (2007). *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* [Kindle Ed.]. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com>

Missio Dei, therefore, is in first place in a list of paradigms (i.e. a reference framework within which Mission is fulfilled). Many paradigms have been used. Bosch (200:510-701) lists twelve of them and each one is the result of an interpretation of Mission.

- a. Mission as *missio Dei*
- b. Mission as mediation of Salvation
- c. Mission as search for Justice
- d. Mission as Evangelisation
- e. Mission as contextualisation of the Gospel
- f. Mission as Liberation
- g. Mission as Enculturation
- h. Mission as common Ecumenical Witness
- i. Mission as Ministry of all the people of God
- j. Mission as Witness to the other Faiths
- k. Mission as Theology
- l. Mission as Hope in action

Paradigms help us to better understand the way the Church has lived out her vocation to mission. Following Küng, Bosch (2000:258) says that “each of these ages reflects a theological paradigm profoundly different from the previous ones ...”. Regarding the methodology, the finality and the expectations, the mission dynamic of the past century Church has been strongly influenced by *missio Dei*. Mission, therefore, is not just sending and sustaining some volunteers but it is the calling of each believer. Every believer is called and sent by God with his or her specific gifts. As the Father sends the Son, and the Father and the Son send the Holy Spirit, now the Father, Son and Holy Spirit send the Church.

The Trinity is communion and mission, interaction and dialogue between the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; its communication (inner dialogue) flows into creation and in the history of humanity. Worth of note is the New Testament concept of mission which could be deduced from what Jesus, his disciples and the apostle Paul practised. Their preaching was directed to all people though Jesus’ message was “primarily” (Acts 13:46; Matthews 10:5) addressed to the people of Israel. Such a limit, as described in Matthew 15:24, will be overcome in what is usually defined as the universalism of Christianity which comprises the people of Israel (Matthew 24:14) (Sievernich, 2012:21-25). In such a context, the words of the risen Jesus to the disciples take on capital importance since He affirms that “all the people” or “the entire world” are the recipients of his salvation. Mission is, therefore, the extension of the Trinitarian dialogue to the world and to humanity through which God invites and introduces mankind to communion with the “divine community”. Essentially, mission is not a Church act but the overflow of the Trinitarian

communion, from the Father who sends the Son who in turn sends the Holy Spirit giving life to the Church in order to make her the visible sign and the means of their mission to the world. *Missio Dei*, therefore, is peculiar to God (see fig. 1). *Propagatio* (Bosch, 2000:349) in spite of human limits and insufficiencies, is entrusted to all Christians.

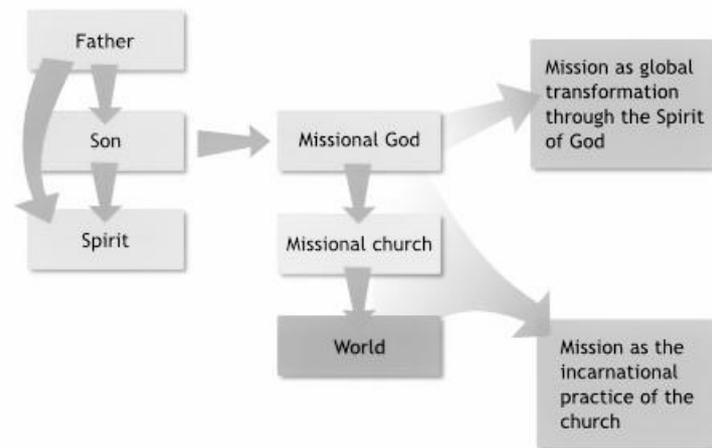


Fig.1: *Missio Dei*

2.3 The Missional Church

The word “missional” appears for the first time in English, in the Oxford English Dictionary (2014) though not being widely used (Certeze, Gilmore J. 2014. *Missionale*, (01):49-51). In the mid-nineties it was recovered by Darrel Guder² who, with others, reprinted and published the book “*Missional Church*” where the term was used for the first time and introduced in the current discussion on the nature of the Church and her Mission (Husband & Treier, 2005:114).

The word “missional” indicates not only one of the missionary programmes in which the Church could be involved, but, rather, it refers to her mission! Therefore, “missional” points out the centrality of Mission, i.e. the Church that exists for mission; her only reason to exist is Mission (Husband & Treier, 2005:116).

A missional Church is the organ appointed to fulfil the important commission stated in Matthew 28:19-20, with a clear understanding of her own responsibility. It is really important to emphasise such a concept since from it follows the *missiones ecclesiae*, i.e. the Church’s missionary activities among which Mission (singular), maintains its primary role while the Missions (plural) are the result (Husband & Treier, 2005:440). Mission is communal and it is done in the community’s name that embodies it. It is the community that announces, serves and witnesses about God’s Kingdom. In this way, in the power of God’s Spirit, it carries on Jesus Christ’s work. The capillary diffusion of Christianity is mostly attributed to the daily Christian living, especially

within the family. This is drawn from reading the Lucan book, the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:46-47) and from some Pauline expressions (Colossians 4:15; Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:19; and Philemon 2). These writings trace the formation of domestic communities which became an important type of “society”, very useful for spreading Christianity, being a kind of “missionary stations”. The expansion happened through social relations which were the decisive element (Bevans & Schoeder, 2010:29,38).

2.4 The Mission: the work of the Holy Spirit

It is useful to examine the missionary praxis and, in order to better understand it, give due value to two examples found in the book of Acts which describe the Early Church life. Worth of note is also the way the missionary character of the Church emerges out of specific contexts. For example, her Jewish identity changes when she recognises the work of the Holy Spirit among the Samaritans (Acts 8), or in the event of the Ethiopian eunuch conversion (Acts 8), or in the case of Cornelius’ conversion (Acts 10:1-11,18) and in the life of the Church in Antiochia (Acts 11:19-26). In the Acts of the Apostles the story is told of the first mission of the newborn Church. Luke, the book’s writer, from the very beginning, reports a dialogue between the risen Lord and his disciples in which He reveals to them that, within a few days, they would be “baptised in the Holy Spirit receiving the Holy Spirit’s power” (Acts 1:5-8). This event occurred in Jerusalem, during the Feast of the Weeks or Pentecost, a feast celebrated on the fiftieth day after Easter. (Leviticus 23:16). The participation in this religious festival was open to all (Sievernich, 2012:33) and Peter’s subsequent preaching placed the Spirit’s role at the centre, giving to all the nations a real hope of salvation. Sievernich (2012:33) writes that the success and expansion of the Christian mission was confirmed by miracles and conversions. The unexpected and exponential growth was attributed to the actions of the believers (Acts 2:42) and the “comfort of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:31).

The missionary action seems strongly connected to the action of the Holy Spirit. The Bible, in the Gospel of John, offers a good amount of information and many declarations that confirm how the Holy Spirit is the only One capable of opening hearts to know the truth (John 13:16). Jesus, talking to relevant Jewish personalities, who well knew the Law, questioned their spirituality since it led neither to a knowledge of God nor to any kind of transforming relationship (John 3:10). In the Good Samaritan parable, Jesus sublimely exposed the qualities of those who say they are serving the Lord while ignoring their neighbour (Luke 10:25-37). This is also visible in Paul’s ministry who turned to the Gentiles, defined as atheists and accursed by the Hebrews, but considered by the Apostle members of God’s family, breaking down, in Christ, all cultural, racial and religious barriers (Galatians 3:28). It is necessary, therefore, in order to effect a real change, to grant space and opportunities to the Holy Spirit’s ministry.

The Holy Spirit works in a visible way throughout the Acts of the Apostles' narrative which inspired and guided the apostles, the disciples and the entire Church to realise God's plan of salvation. Two events recorded in the book of Acts will be of great help to better describe what this is about. The Book of Acts gives a clear picture of the emerging Church which responds faithfully to her entrusted mission. In Luke the Church's action is projected to the external, from Jerusalem to Judea and Samaria and then, till the "end of the world" (Acts 1:8). In so doing, while Mission is formed, the Church is shaped (Bevans & Schoeder, 2010:39).

The first event is the following:

Acts 4:³²And the congregation of those who believed were of one heart and soul; and none of them claimed that anything belonging to him was his own, but all things were common property to them. ³³And with great power the apostles were giving testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and abundant grace was upon them all. ³⁴For there was not a needy person among them, for all who were owners of land or houses would sell them and bring the proceeds of the sales, ³⁵and lay them at the apostles' feet, and they would be distributed to each as any had need.

"And the congregation "... were of one heart and soul ...". This passage gives a summary framework of the intimate life of the Church as described in Acts. In the prior mentioned section, the Christian behavioural model is well traced. According to Marshall, in his commentary on the book of Acts (1980:142-144), strong emphasis is placed on the disciples' generosity, within the community life, which accompanied the Apostles' preaching. Luke, gives great relevance to an important aspect, i.e. the gift of the Spirit (Acts 4:31) which resulted in the inspired preaching and in the believers' communion and generosity. It was an irrepressible force capable of defeating even poverty. "The congregation" acted, not just some or few of them. The choice of such a term "congregation" indicates the exponential growth of a group of people united in one thought and in one common aim. This Church was able to contextualise the gospel message translating it into action with the words "love", "charity," "solidarity". None among the Apostles regarded of secondary or marginal importance the believers' role. The results were unexpected and shocking proving the rightness of such a direction. Acting as one "body" conferred to the Church "abundant grace" and God's favour made her prosper while preaching and living the Gospel. Admittedly, the "preach-action together with the way the gospel was lived" of the early Church was really efficacious and, as a result, there was the coming in of thousands and thousands of new converts (Acts 5:14; 6:1,7). The Gospel reached social classes and places where it would never thought to enter. "... for all who were owners of land or houses sold them". Worth of note is the adjective "all" (used twice): "all" makes us think that the Church mission was to reach all, as saying "all for all", a good equation. "All" leaves no escape, it is unequivocal: "all" and means exactly "all". It is

omni comprehensible, absolute, and indisputable. The Church felt the need, the necessity to be involved in an active witness. In so doing, the Gospel reached the end of the world and her strong determination, generosity and spontaneity, even today, speaks to the world and to all who read the book of Acts. Jesus' promise, that they would reach the end of the world, starting from Jerusalem, was accomplished: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you shall be my witnesses both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and even to the remotest part of the earth" (Acts 1:8) and more: "... bring the proceeds of the sales and lay them at the apostles' feet". In these few verses, where the apostles are mentioned twice, it is added that the proceeds of the sales given to them, were distributed according to the necessities. The apostles had given clear indications on how to face the situation and consequently, all accomplished their part of mission; the body of Christ acted like one man. Furthermore, Scriptures point out a particular detail: "... they would be distributed to each as any had need". "As any had need", what does it mean? How could it happen that all those in need, with no exception, did receive the necessary? What kind of organisation did the apostles create to accomplish such a job? There were no Unions, NGOs, Social Assistance Centres or Social workers. How did it happen? Who did this extraordinary work practically? The answer is, the CHURCH, her members, God's consecrated men and women, able to establish a network of communications and distribution to make modern marketing experts pale. This is the missional Church, i.e. the one which does not wait on others to do what Jesus told her to do, as Luke 9:12-13 well illustrates:

¹²Now the day was ending, and the twelve came and said to Him, "Send the crowd away, that they may go into the surrounding villages and countryside and find lodging and get something to eat; for here we are in a desolate place" ¹³But He said to them, "You give them something to eat!"

God's ancient promise (Deuteronomy 14:4) was now accomplished by the Church, through her richest members (Acts 4:34). There were men capable of creating an efficient solidarity programme, and God's grace soon flowed among them! In Acts chapter 13 it is written:

¹Now there were in Antioch, on the church that was there, prophets and teachers: Barnabas, and Simeon who was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaem who had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul ²While they were ministering to the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me 'Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them away'" ³Then, when they had fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

A first important reference is: "... on the church ...". Once again, the local Church is the place chosen by God from where to continue his mission and this is a confirmation of the centrality of the body of Christ for the fulfilment of the worldwide mission (Acts 1:8). The Church signifies the

future coming of God's kingdom being the sign (Van den Toren, 2011:184) of such a kingdom, the "now and yet to come" was entitled to represent the King who comes. We read: "While they were ministering to the Lord ...". While worshipping, praying and fasting, God speaks to them proving that the missionary call cannot be separated from a relationship with Him. Those called to represent Him need to know Him already, personally and intimately. Worship is, therefore, the community occasion in which God speaks and reveals Himself. "... the Holy Spirit said ...". The way the Holy Spirit spoke is not revealed but we might suppose that someone inspired by God, spoke (Acts 13:1). Anyway, God powerfully stepped in the midst of the meeting and assumed the direction of the service. The Church could not resist the voice coming from on high; the only answer was: "... laid their hands on them, they sent them away". Here is the new element: the Church sends two of her men. Here we find a specific vocation, for a specific purpose, a specific task in an appointed time. Besides a collective expression, space is left for a specific call; one does not exclude the other. Neglecting the importance of this moment means to miss the opportunity to enter in deep communion with the body of Christ. Consequently, there will be an estrangement from the local pastoral ministry, creating a distorted image of a "missionary" (Cameron and Rosner, 2010:57-58).

2.5 Conclusion:

The invitation is to rediscover the missionary practice beginning from God Himself. In Christ and by the work of the Spirit, God does give birth to the missional Church. Her nature, ministry and organisation come from the power and will of God. The missional Church is Missionary by her own nature.³

Actually, *missio Dei*, represents the starting point from where others come. Through the years, what just started as a movement became an institution. This is the reason why it is so necessary to rethink the Church and the Christian role. In so doing, it becomes possible to come across the "Missional Church" concept, i.e. that kind of Church which accepts the responsibility of the missionary vocation organising herself and involving all her members. There is still confusion on the meaning of the term "Missional". Some people use it to claim a priority of Missions on the various Church activities. This is a way to identify a congregation according to what she does. The idea of a missional Church takes a completely different direction trying to concentrate on what the Church is, i.e. a Spirit created community possessing a peculiar nature conferring on her a unique identity. To better understand the nature of the Church, aims and strategies are not insignificant to a missional Church but necessary.

³ Gelder, V. & Craig. (2007). The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit [Kindle Ed.]. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com>

The missional Church directs thinking on the way God acts in the world. The Triune God, and not the Church, becomes the main active subject. God has a mission in the world, the so called *missio Dei* (God's mission). A better understanding of the *missio Dei* helps us to comprehend that God, by his Spirit, created the Church, which He calls, gathers together and sends to the world to participate in God's Mission.⁴

The book of the Acts of the Apostles offers an episodic picture of the first Church's missionary experience, in which we clearly see how the Church-time coincides with the time of the Spirit (Sievernich, 2012:30).

The Holy Spirit calls specific men for a specific duty, changing from a general call (the Church) to a specific one (some men). It was the Church that sent her own people and not a personal, independent initiative. The Church prayed and sent and it will always be the Church who will send other people to other churches to help them accomplish God's work. Anyway, this method is not exclusive since the essential is that the missional Church is always at the centre of the decision, sending men in obedience to the Holy Spirit's voice (Acts 13:1-3), recommending them to God's grace and equipping them with the necessary to perform their service (Acts 13:1-3). Luke's narrative, which spans Acts 13:4-52 to 14:1-28 is an extraordinary summary of the expansion of the Gospel in "a foreign land" (Marshall, 1990:299). Acts 14:27 states: "When they had arrived and gathered the church together, they began to report all things that God had done with them and how He had opened a door of faith to the Gentiles".

The action of the Church resulted in a territorial expansion. Paul's strategy was implemented in the creation of house churches. In the apostolic age, the churches reproduced themselves through the house church system (Chester & Timmis, 2014: 98).

Acts 2:46-47, "... Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved".

The Church, in any political and socio-economical context, is called to perform a service (*diakonia*). She is called to live out her faith as people of God, witnessing what God has done in Jesus Christ. The Church, by her service, participates in God's mission revealing the strength of service which prevails over any power. She testifies of God's transforming Grace by acts of

⁴ Gelder, V. & Craig. (2007). The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit [Kindle Ed.]. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com>

service which reveal God's kingdom. The Holy Spirit will help his men, equipping and supporting them in every possible way so that, where there is no Church, there will be one soon.

CHAPTER 3 A HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE EVANGELICAL AND MISSIONARY PRESENCE IN ITALY

3.1 Foreword

The research deems it necessary to trace a historical overview of the presence and impact of the Evangelical Church in Italy as a Missionary institution. Italy is geographically connected to a continent made up of states historically favourable to missions, which have expanded well beyond their national borders but not in Italy itself. A brief historical excursus will clarify the reasons. From the XIXth century, some European nations like Germany, Belgium, England and France, expanded their colonial domains. In those years and in those nations, there were a rapid expansion of Churches and Missionary Associations. The term "mission" was inextricably linked to this colonial era. This indicated a church in Europe that sent delegates to convert overseas peoples. The church, Catholic or Protestant, had the right to entrust its mission to secular powers (armies and commercial companies), and mission meant extending the Western ecclesiastical system to the rest of the world. The spread of faith and colonial policies became so intertwined that it was often difficult to distinguish one from the other (Bosch, 2000:318-323). In this expanding phase, it became difficult to separate and distinguish religious motivations from the commercial-political ones. Missionaries in a foreign country stimulated their own Governments to annex a specific territory before other nations, considered as rivals, would take possession of them (Bevans & Schroeder, 2010:344-346). This is why European maritime powers subdivided Asia and Africa. In Indonesia and in South Asia the Dutch Indies developed, thanks to the Eastern Indies Company trade with the British Colonial Empire. France made claims on Indo-China as well as on other territories like Annam and Siam (Sievernich, 2012:127,128). Even the Pacific islands were subdivided by colonial powers. Soon Catholic as well as Protestant Missionary Associations, made their way in. An example of the kind of relationship between Mission and Colonial expansion is taken by looking at two personalities: The Scot David Livingstone (Tucker, 1992:156-165) and the German Friedrich Fabri (Sievernich 2012: 131). The first favoured a link between commerce and Christianity; the second affirmed that Germany had a cultural mission and that Christian missions are useful for commercial activities and colonial annexations. Friedrich Fabri affirmed that missionaries were cultural pioneers whose duty was to educate Africans on commerce and work, turning them into good colonial citizens.

And Italy? What is the position of the Evangelical Church in the missionary praxis? Italy, besides the territorial expansion of the Catholic Church, among Evangelicals did not display a great missionary outburst. It is useful to know the reasons of this failure, either for the Missionary aspect of it or for explaining the limited Evangelical presence in the country which, even today, with few

exceptions in the South-Central part of Italy, is a reality. We might find an explanation by looking at the peculiarity of the Italian culture, heir of a past in which the land was fragmented into little states called municipalities⁵ divided and armed one against the other. When the message of the Gospel reached them, the limits as well as the conditionings, emerged as never before: a) the permanent and all influencing presence of the Catholic Church; b) the inner weaknesses of the Evangelical front; c) historical-political events. The beginning and development of such a change was not easy.

3.2 Historical background of the Waldensian Church as avant-garde of the Italian Evangelism

The Italian context is a special case for the following reasons. First of all, there is the presence of the Popery which, with its social as well as formative structures, has always shaped the conscience of the people regarding moral and political choices (Cairns, 1970:239), to the point that for the majority of the Italians, "Christianity", even today, means "Roman Catholicism". This is a clear disadvantage since it overshadows an existing minority in a nation where the majority of the population declares to be Catholic, though non-practicing (Jenkins, 2009:59-67). The "game is played" on the field of a nation which is legally married to Catholicism as the official religion, though the State did belatedly modify⁶ in 1984, the Lateran Pacts.⁷ Italy is, by tradition, a Roman Catholic country, a country where public schools do not teach "religion" but "Catholic religion". A second problem is brought about by the modest critical will of the Italians, too often grown up, religiously, in a tradition passively received from their ancestors. Knowing that, in Italy, religion has always been a mass phenomenon and that the level of literacy is very low,⁸ and that until the 1960-'70s the Mass (in the Catholic Church) was recited in Latin, the consequences are easily predictable.

⁵ Nascita dei Comuni. (n.d.). Riassunto di Storia. Available at: <https://doc.studenti.it/riassunto/storia/3/nascita-comuni.html> (Accessed 23/03/2018).

⁶ The first Agreement with the Waldensians which, since 1979 united with the Methodists, came only in 1984, just few days after the revision of the Agreement signed by the Italian Government with the Vatican State. It was an historical turning point useful to the Adventists, Pentecostals, Hebrews, Baptists and Lutherans.

⁷ Patti Lateranensi (2018): il 18 febbraio 1984 Craxi e cardinale Casaroli modificarono il Concordato. Available at: <https://www.direttanews.it/2012/02/18/patti-lateranensi-il-18-febbraio-1984-craxi-e-cardinale-casaroli-modificarono-il-concordato/> (Accessed 11/03/2018).

⁸ Ten years after unification the rate of illiteracy was 7 out of 10. Such percentage dropped to 48,5% at the beginning of the new century and to 27,4% in 1921. After the Second World War illiteracy still plagued the 12,9% of the population; it was the introduction, in the mid-fifties, of the compulsory schooling until 14 years of age, which halved illiteracy. In 1961 those who were unable to read and write dropped to 8,3% and, in the following four years, to 1,5% Istat. (2011). L'Italia in cifre. Available at <https://www.istat.it/it/files/2011/03/Italia-in-cifre.pdf> (Accessed 11/03/2018).

Thirdly, to the few possessing a primary education, reading and interpreting the Bible was forbidden.⁹

At this point we ponder on the mission of the Evangelicals and to whom it should be addressed. Should the Catholics be evangelised, helping them to go back to the pure Gospel, or should our energies be directed to the conversion of non-Christians? (Bosch, 2000:565 ff.). An answer is needed to clarify the kind of dialogue that should be established with the about 60 million Italians who declare to be Catholics.

This short historical account, beginning during the XIIIth century, helped to better understand the reasons why the Evangelicals (vulgarly called “evangelists”, and then, “shakers” or “*pentecostier*”) represented, and still do represent, at the most, a neglected minority without any influence on State public affairs in Italy. Nevertheless, the witness of men and women of the past, is not negligible at all but, as it will now be clarified, paved the way to what, after a few centuries, will be known as the Protestant Reformation.

In the XIIIth century there were weak but meaningful signals of a change, anticipating what in the XVIth century Europe, was defined as the “Protestant Reformation”. It sanctioned the end of the Ancient Age and the birth of the Modern era. In the religious realm, a small group of people experienced a new awareness of their Christian identity gathering around an almost legendary but real character, a certain Waldo or Waldense. It happened in Lyon, approximately in 1170, and his followers took the name of Waldensians (Tourn, 1977:9).

The first traces of their presence in Italy in the Valleys of the Cozie Alps, date back to 1200 and they would become a bulwark against the rampant persecutions. Waldensio (Waldo) preached the gospel independently from the Catholic authority and permission. It was a preaching faithful to the Scripture (the Gospels) translated into the common language of the people of his country and copied extensively. The poor, who now could read the Bible in their own language, responded positively, but in a time when the RCC detained the monopoly of faith, this was considered a revolutionary event. They did not plan to change or revolutionise the Catholic institution, but simply rediscover and proclaim the gospel message. The group was made of people belonging to all social classes with simple preaching pointing to repentance. What was really revolutionary was the women’s involvement in the preaching! In so doing, they violated one of the strongest prejudices of the time. Anyway, they did not establish a new Church order or a fraternity

⁹ La Bibbia Vietata dalla Chiesa Cattolica. (n.d.). Cristiani Cattolici: Studi biblici. Available at: <http://www.cristianicattolici.net/la-bibbia-vietata-chiesa-cattolica.html> (Accessed on 14/03/2018).

considering themselves just as “friends united in the missionary work” (Tourn, 1977:14-17) within the walls of their city. The excommunication brought cultural, theological as well as political discredit. At the 1184 Council of Verona the movement was included in the dissidents’ *black list* and officially condemned in 1190, by the Narbonne Bishop (Tourn, 1977:17) as heretical. This year marks the beginning of the Italian Evangelical history and mission which is the history of something totally unexpected and absolutely new.

The RCC watched over this new phenomenon trying to absorb it. When the attempt failed, the RCC tried to destroy it by harassments, discriminations and even slaughters. The movement moved into Italy where it took a different aspect and name. In Milan, Lombardy, its members were known as the Lombards. Their work commitment as well as social solidarity and a great organisational capacity leading to the training of a new leadership, were considered by them a type of witness. The Waldensians, as they would be known later, were capable of creating their own history and finding their own place in it, tracing back their origins to the times of Constantine. They clearly detached themselves from what the Church had become after the “Constantine Donations”, when the essence and the form of the Church changed forever (Cairns, 1970:188).

The kind of church proposed by the Waldensians was not an improved version of the Roman Catholic one, but a completely new type. In this new model, which anticipated the Reformations, each believer is a priest bypassing any priestly power and the Catholic Church Magistry. Due importance should be given to the taking of oaths which was drastically refused by the Waldensians defining it as a mortal sin. Oaths in the medieval society were the foundation of all social relationships. Every person was tied to his superior by an “oath of loyalty” which committed him to obedience and to reciprocal assistance (Tourn, 1977:63). To refuse it meant to escape all social relationships, becoming an outlaw. This is why the Waldensians’ attitude was considered subversive and did not escape the attention of political and religious authorities who did not hesitate to repress them.

Their history of persecution for religious reasons continued till the Reformation Age. The hardness of persecution by the hand of the Catholic Church and the Dukes of Savoy proves the level of danger they represented in the very Italian Catholic soil (Caponetto, 1997:145). Attempting to defend what they had, the Waldensians limited their missionary impulse. Compelled to live in hiding though being still part of the society, they attended the Catholic Church meetings. In those times, social and religious life were strongly connected by law, tradition and uses.

3.3 The Italian Evangelicals and the Protestant Reformation

The Italian Evangelicals, in the framework of the Protestant Reformation, and within the limits imposed by the circumstances in which they lived, played their role. However, what resonance did the revolutionary Protestant message in Italy have among people who used to look at the Vatican as the centre of Christianity? In the XVIth century Popery assumed a new visibility becoming an Italian principality and the main character was Pope Julius 2nd. He acted in such a way that it became impossible to distinguish between a Prince with his court, and the Head of the Catholic Church representing Christ on earth. The Pope devoted himself to the exercise of temporal power assisted by an often uneducated and corrupted number of bishops. In addition, there was the decay of the female as well as the male monasteries, a widespread illiteracy of the secular clergy and the scandalous conduct of the Roman Curia.

It is interesting to know the real condition of the common people of Italy's religious life of the time. A report given by the Jesuits who preached in Abruzzo, Puglia, Calabria and Sicilia, describes those regions as the "Italian Indie" in need of being evangelised before planning to go into faraway countries. They found rough people, more pagan than Christian (Caponetto, 1997:18).

The eruption of Protestantism in Italy did not only represent the coming of a new religious phenomenon or a variation from what until then had been considered Christian faith, but a revolutionary, radical new event. It was a change of civilization which affected all levels of the society. The "Luther" case was not limited to the Roman diplomatic environment or to the theologians' exclusive one, but it attracted curiosity and interest from well cultured people: schoolteachers, writers, jurists, doctors and merchants.

The Lutheran ideas spread rapidly through the commercial routes and Alpine passes. Regions such as Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli and Trentino were the access doors into Italy. The coastal regions participated too, opening their ports where ships arrived full of "heretical" books (Caponetto, 1997:55). Nevertheless, in the Italian states, with few exceptions, nobody dared to take the initiative in challenging the violent reaction of the Roman pope.

In 1560 an edict was issued by Emanuele Filiberto marking, officially, the beginning of the persecution against the Waldensians. The freedom of conscience was abrogated at the risk, for the first time, of a fine and a life sentence just for listening the Lutheran ministers.

In 1561, entire villages were destroyed from north (Provence) to south (Calabria). People were burned as human torches, others were sold as slaves to the Moors, tied to the bar until dying of

starvation; others were slaughtered in the parish churchyard of Montalto Uffugo on 11 June 1561. In those places the Jesuits finished the job erasing all the traces of Waldism.¹⁰

The benchmarks of De Valdés' teaching were Justification by faith, Regeneration and Sanctification. The Catholic Church accused him of heresy infecting all Italy. Lutheran ideas reached Sicily, Tuscany and Veneto. Sicily seemed to have been the first place where his ideas were spread, due to Benedetto Fontanini, a Mantuan Benedictine, indicated as the author of the '*Beneficio di Cristo*' (Zovatto, 2002:296).

Getting in touch with Valdés after his move to the Benedictine Monastery of S. Nicolò l'Arena in Catania, he remembered his talks with a Spanish gentleman deciding to write down his work. He brought to the Sicilian monasteries the echo of the conversations he had in the Italian north as well as in southern Erasmian and Reformed circles. Notably also is Bernardino Ochino who is considered to be one of Valdés' disciples. In Palermo and Messina he preached the Reformation's ideas and was accused of heresy (Caponetto, 1997:93).

Many Protestants were discovered and condemned in Messina. In about twenty years, from 1555 to 1572, Messina was considered a burden by the Inquisitors who often came to do their investigations.

In Palermo, too, there was a strong unprecedented repression and more than a hundred people were condemned. Syracuse, where from 1556 to 1561 the Protestant ideas were widely preached, suffered the same kind of persecution. Underground groups, between Noto and Syracuse arose. Catania, a university site, reached by the Reformation Movement ideas, suffered an extended repression by the Roman Church.

About a hundred prisoners were kept and questioned in the Catania Ursino Castle's jail. On March 13th, 1569 in the Duomo Square, a stage was built where the main authorities of the city sat to investigate, publicly, the prisoners. Many of them were condemned to flogging and sentenced to imprisonment, though some penalties were suspended (Caponetto, 1997:417-432).

Worth of note is a short-lived religious movement which remained marginal: the Italian Anabaptists. It operated in Veneto for about two years, from 1549 and 1551. Information about the rise of the movement in Italy is uncertain but the ideas popularised by a certain Tiziano have nothing in common with Thomas Muntzer's. Tiziano built a community in Asolo, near Treviso, and

¹¹ Massacro dei Valdesi in Calabria. (2015). Available at <http://www.store.rubbettinoeditore.it/il-massacro-dei-valdesi-in-calabria-del-1561> (Accessed on 12/03/2018).

wherever he went he was able to stimulate people's attention and attract new disciples (Gastaldi, 1981:563-567).

The idea regarding the church was very simple: two or three persons were sufficient for establishing one. The fundamental activities of these churches were the brotherly fellowship, inter-community exchanges, and the hospitality to travelling ministers. There were no ecclesiastical hierarchical structures above the local communities. To the Reformation principles were added adult baptism, community equality and non-violence. Other communities were founded; the most influential were those in the Vicenza area. The number was not large, about 500 people altogether in the various churches of the territory. Many believers were arrested and even executed (Caponetto, 1997:248-253). The Roman Inquisition won the cooperation of some Italian states to launch raids in order to destroy the movement so that in 1552 the Italian Anabaptism was considered to have been completely defeated (Gastaldi, 1981:567-577).

Among the many personalities of the Italian Reformation, there were strong personalities such as Pietro Martire Vermigli, Bernardino Ochino, Pierpaolo Carnesecchi, Celio Secondo Curione, Aonio Paleario, and Girolamo Zanchi and Ludovico Castelvetro (Storia del Cristianesimo, 1992:394).

Large cities, which accepted the Reformation ideas, were: Torino, Cremona, Rovigo, Venice, Mantova, Modena, Ferrara, Faenza, Lucca, Siena, and Naples e Messina. Today, we can surely affirm that Protestantism was a widespread phenomenon though, compared to other nations, limited in numbers. The Roman Inquisition strongly opposed the diffusion of Protestantism and, as already noted, in many Italian States there were court trials, persecutions and executions. What emerge from these data is the following: death sentences by the Roman Inquisition continued with decreasing rhythm throughout the XVIIth century until 1761.

3.4 Italian Evangelicals between the Counterreformation (1545-1563) and 1848

Protestantism could do nothing against the excessive power of the RCC. The Reformation was followed by a Counterreformation. Pope Paul III renewed the Inquisition following the Spanish pattern (Heussi-Miegge, 1984:205). All the Italian evangelical movements were annihilated remorselessly. Chronicles of those times tell of tragedies which occurred in the Calabria Waldensian colonies, of the forced catholicisation of the Waldensians in Puglia and of the martyrdom of some prominent Calvinists (Caponetto, 1997:365).

The *reconquista* meant the doctrinal, disciplinary and moral restoration of the RCC. Directions were given at the Trent Council lasted for almost 18 years. The repression weapon, i.e. the Inquisition, was directly guided by Paul IV. Scaring people, the Counterreformation managed to

subdue the free press, the printing presses, academies and universities. The Italian states had to accept the situation (Caponetto, 1997:367). Waldensians and Cardinal Pole's¹¹ disciples were imprisoned together with other famous names of Italian Waldism (Caponetto, 1997:368). The year 1848 was a turning point for Europe since, particularly in France, Germany and Italy, there was a strong revolutionary feeling. Italy, because of the Vatican, faced the revolution from the Catholic perspective under Pio IX's pontificate.¹² He tried to take advantage of the renewed spirit of nationalism calling the Italian States to a stronger cohesion. When Sicily detached from the Bourbon domain and North Italy rebelled against Austria he prayed: "Sovereign God, bless Italy and preserve the precious gift of faith" (Storia del Cristianesimo, 1992:513). He had to escape from Rome returning only in 1850. Not obtaining more consents he launched a remaking action publishing the *Ineffabilis Deus*¹³ bull, sanctioning the new dogma of the Virgin Mary's Immaculate Conception. What might be considered only marginal, in practice, reinforced the worship of Mary and the papal authority. In a subsequent document, the Catholic Church condemned political liberalism, any kind of rationalism, liberal theology, Masonry and any kind of religious tolerance. Nobody escaped this edict, not even the Biblical Society. In the light of what had happened in France, Pio IX opposed the separation between Church and State. At the top of his "delirium of omnipotence", in 1869, after calling together the Vatican Council I, he declared the dogma of the infallibility of the Pope officially issued in 1870. In Italy, from the Evangelical standpoint, the year 1848 was considered as a half-win. The Albertine Statute of the 8th of February 1848 (Tourn, 1977:200 ff.) introduced an innovative element concerning the "Waldensians" which was received as a sort of release from the Catholic yoke. A half-win, nevertheless. Here is Article 1 of the Statute: "The Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, is the sole official State religion. The other existing forms of worship, in conformity with the law, are tolerated."

In this way, while degrading any other religious confessions defined as "cults" and, even, "tolerated", a place of absolute importance was granted to the RCC (Spini, 2002:74). On February 17, 1848 King Charles Albert introduced the "Letters Patent" by which civil rights were granted to the Waldensians.¹⁴ In conclusion, civil but not religious rights. The king's representative, present at the 1848 Synod, is related as saying that the Waldesians had become part of the "large Italian

¹¹ Pole Reginald. (2012). Available at: http://www.instoria.it/home/reginald_pole.htm (Accessed on 17/05/2018).

¹² Papa Pio IX Biografia (2000) Available at: http://www.vatican.va/news_services/liturgy/saints/ns_lit_doc_20000903_pius-ix_it.html (Accessed on 19/05/2018).

¹³ Encyclicals Ineffabilis Deus (n.d.). Available at: <http://www.papalencyclicals.net/Pius09/p9ineff.htm> (Accessed on 29/03/2018).

¹⁴ Chiesa Evangelica Valdese (n.d.) Unione delle Chiese metodiste e valdesi. Available at: <https://www.chiesavaldese.org/> (Accessed on 14/03/2018).

family”. But how to live as free citizens after 300 years of persecution and 150 of segregation? How to become part of the “family” from which they had been excluded for centuries?

The end of this story is a *format* which, since then, continues to repeat itself. The Waldesians did not receive freedom, but they had to fight for it. In this battle for religious freedom, the Waldensian churches were helped by the progressive forces of the Piedmontese society, particularly by Cavour who had been influenced by the English and Geneva Protestants. The sentence “a free church in a free state” is due to him (Tourn, 1977:215). The freedom offered to the Waldensians was well calculated aiming to win the favour of foreign nations in the hope of their intervention in the Italian political affairs. Even less clear is the action of the Piedmontese police that tried to inhibit every form of the just granted freedom.

3.5 The Evangelicals since 1848 to the Unification of Italy: difficulties and the first missionary presence.

History passes on some information regarding the behaviour of the Italian rulers. They simply applied the decisions taken by the Roman Catholic Church (RCC). In 1848, King Charles Emmanuel III of Savoy decided to implement his investigation plan against the Waldensians, who were at the spearhead of Italian evangelism (Campi-Rubboli, 1997:368, 373). Here is a summary of his action: 1) He strengthened the RCC parish churches in the Waldensians’ valleys; 2) he created a bishopric to watch over the Waldensians; 3) In 1743, with the aim of welcoming and educating the Catholic faith to the kidnapped Waldensian children, the Cathecumens’ hospice was moved to Pinerolo (Waldensian Valleys);¹⁵ 4) In 1739 the “Royal Loan Agency”¹⁶ gave to the Catholics the needed funds to buy lands in the Waldensian territory occupying the land and eradicating, *de facto*, the inhabitants. All this ended in “1798 when Piedmont was annexed by the revolutionary and Napoleonic France”. For the first time, a Government recognised the Waldensians’ civil rights and freedom of worship. The pastor’s salary was paid with money taken from the sale of the RCC goods. Overall, the Waldensians enthusiastically welcomed the ideas of progress and freedom coming from France.¹⁷

¹⁵ Palazzo Vittone, at the centre of Pinerolo. It was destined to the maintenance and catholic education of the Waldensian children illegally taken from their own legal parents who were compelled to pay for their schooling. The institution, born in Torino in 1676, lasted until 1890.

¹⁶ Built in Pinerolo for “Catholics and catholicized” of the mixed valleys in order to lend money to those wishing to buy lands in the valleys. The aim was to establish groups of Catholic farmers and breeders for whom to build parish churches in opposition to the Waldensian temples

¹⁷ PINEROLO V A L D E S E dal ghetto alla concessione dei diritti civili (2010). Available at: <http://www.pinerolovaldese.org/pinerolovaldese/pinerolo10.php> (Accessed on 19/05/2018).

Though limited to Italy, 20 September 1870 is a very important date not only historically, but also religiously. The capture of Rome (Breccia di Porta Pia) brought new political as well as religious hopes. Many saw in it the end of an age, a long age, of undisputed RCC dominion. The “Breccia of Porta Pia” was viewed as the expression of the Italian liberal and evangelical resurgence (Spini, 2002:195). On the eve of the Italian Renaissance, there was the widespread idea of Jesus’ imminent return and of a total break with the papacy, a kind of replication of the Protestant Reform. From 1789 to 1875, in obedience to the Great Commission, there was a worldwide explosion of Missionary enterprise by Anglo-Saxons and American churches and organisations that sent missionaries to most parts of the world. Among these lands there was Italy which, after the 1861 collapse of the papacy, by the efforts of foreign missionaries belonging to well established denominations, saw the rise of Evangelical churches. The Waldensian Church was not the only expression of Protestantism in Italy anymore. At the same time, in some Italian areas, there were chapels authorised to act in places where foreigners were living. There was a Protestant church in Bergamo while other churches arose in the main port cities, such as Genova, Livorno, Nizza, Napoli. Even in Rome there was a Protestant chapel. By the ministry of the Scottish Church, other Missionary stations were opened in Livorno, Florence and, by the Reformed Church, in Torino. In those centres of religious ferment, the echo of the worldwide movement known as the *Awakening* was heard, which also interested Italy. The interest in such a movement grew, though partially, from the development of philanthropic associations funded by foreign evangelical moneylenders. A clear example is Tuscany where men such as Guicciardini and Montanelli, helped by important personalities of the Swiss Awakening movement such as Matilde Calandrini or the Eynard bankers, undertook educational work. For different reasons even the English and German awakened evangelical societies and showed great interest in Italy emphasising apocalyptic events connected to the fall of the Papacy (defined as Babylon) (Cairns, 1970:503 ff.).

A similarly important role was played by the British and Foreign Bible Society. It had the honour and burden to print thousands of Bibles to be distributed in the land, expecting that soon in Italy – at the fall of Papacy – there would be a movement similar to the Reformation. In Italy, the real Awakening happened at the coming of Felix Neff, a Geneva preacher who visited the Waldensian Valleys.

By his awakened preaching a great change, caused by his enthusiastic preaching of renewal centred on Christ’ work, was visible within the Waldensian Church.¹⁸ An evangelistic fervour ran through the Peninsula. Missionaries came from traditionally protestant countries: Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, the Salvation Army, and also the Brethren Church (of English origin) and the

¹⁸ Tourn, G. (2017). 1517-1817-2017, fra Riforma e risveglio.riforma.it. Available at: <https://www.riforma.it/it/articolo/2017/03/23/1517-1817-2017-fra-riforma-e-risveglio> (Accessed on 14/03/2018).

Free Church of the fiery preacher Alessandro Gavazzi, chaplain of the Garibaldi troops (Cairns, 1970: 512).

The Italian Methodism is the result of two different missions. The first one, is the English Methodist Wesleyan Missionary Society which, in 1859 sent to Italy one of its secretaries, pastor William Arthur.¹⁹

Another component of Worldwide Methodism, the American Methodist Episcopal Church, in 1871 sent pastor Leroy Monroe Vernon. At that time, the denominational identity was so strong that it was impossible to unify the two Methodist missions working in Italy, though this was desired and recommended. The result was the rise, on September 10th 1874, in Bologna, of the “Italian Episcopal Methodist Church”. The Baptist presence in Italy as the Methodist one goes back to English and American missions which, at the beginning, were five. In the panorama of Christian missions the Salvation Army is a unique particular action.²⁰ Its beginnings, in united Italy, were in Rome in 1887 (Armistead, 1987:28 ff.) and were always particularly troubled due to the incomprehension (and often derision) of many, and to the local authorities’ refusal to grant them permission to hold public meetings. The “Seventh-day Christian Adventist Church” established in the U.S.A. in the first half of the XIXth century, came to the European Continent in the second half of the same century, starting right from Italy and, once more, from the Piedmont Waldensian Valleys. The first “Adventists” were two Waldensians, Caterina Revel and Jean David Geymet. They believed that evangelism all over Italy was the essential duty of the new Italian churches though there was some confusion between evangelism and a violent anticlerical controversy (Cairns, 1970:511). Despite this relevant missionary zeal, history tells that after the capture of Rome, at least for the Evangelicals who had overloaded this event with hope, nothing changed. In fact, the new Italian Government was only concerned with regularising its relations with the Holy See. Rather than changing art.1 of the Statute, it worried about launching the “Law of Guarantees”²¹ almost to indemnify the Papacy for the previously suffered expropriations. The Law, 20 articles total, guaranteed to the pope, already at art. 1, the inviolability of his person, the conferring on him of sovereign honours (equating him to foreign presidents), the possibility to maintain armed guards at his service, the possession of “sacred buildings” (Vatican, Lateran, Villa Castel Gandolfo and relative pertinences) extra-territoriality, freedom of postal and telegraphic

¹⁹ Metodismo in Italia. (2014). La chiesa metodista in Italia. Available at: <http://chiesametodistalaspeszia.org/sc/metodismo-in-italia/> (Accessed on 14/03/2018).

²⁰ Esercito della Salvezza (2005). Le Religioni in Italia. Available at: <http://www.cesnur.com/lesercito-della-salvezza/> (Accessed on 14/03/2018).

²¹ Melloni, A. (2011) La legge delle guarentigie. La legge delle guarentigie. Available at: <http://www.150anni-lanostratoria.it/index.php/nemici-italia-unita/la-legge-delle-guarentigie> (Accessed on 26/03/2018).

communications. At art. 4 the law established an annual endowment to the Roman Curia [...]. In essence, the Italian State committed itself to pay the costs of maintenances of the papal court now that the popes were missing the revenues deriving from the possession of an autonomous State. Finally, the law aimed to regulate the relations between State and Church. To her members, the State guaranteed maximum freedom of exercising the cult, of assembly, of movement and testimony within the Italian Kingdom. The *placet* and *exequator* (royal privileges) were abolished. Bishops, moreover, were not required to take the oath of loyalty to the king.” The Left-wing opponents reacted requesting recognition of and full freedom to Hebrews and Evangelicals. The Chamber of Deputies’ reply was the approval of the Agenda confirming the tolerance of cults other than State religion. In practice, at any moment, the State could deprive the Evangelicals of the little “conditional” freedom they had. Thirty years after these events, the hopes of those who foresaw the ruin of the Papacy and the advent of a reform similar to that of the XVIth century, were miserably shipwrecked. The numerical growth of the Evangelical churches was a rather episodic phenomenon. The statistics (Spini, 2002:85) show that the years between 1871 and 1901 represent a stasis of the advance of Italian Protestantism. In an 1886 publication (*L'Italia evangelica*, IX 1889, n.2:12) can be read: “Frankly, we have to admit that the evangelisation in Italy is not thriving. If here there is progress, in other places there is regress; if here there is fiery zeal, the same is extinguished there. We might accuse superstition, indifference, corruption, mundanity of the age and all other God’s and Gospel’s enemies, but we have also failed in many things.”

3.6 Conclusion

This was the Mission field in which, with many difficulties and at the cost of their own lives, Italian Evangelical Christians moved ahead and faced people’s criticism. All Evangelicals are their debtors. They wrote important pages of history, doing what they could with the means and knowledge they had. Valdo Vinay affirms that the Italian Evangelicals supported a “laicist” thesis not to be strangled and see the evangelising action nullified within the Italian population. He says: “Here, in Italy, we defend ourselves against being absorbed or dispersed, in order to carry out, nevertheless, our evangelical proclamation” (Peyrot, 2013:33). The difficulties for the evangelical church do not stop here. To get an even more detailed picture, in the following chapter other important causes will be examined that explain why the Italian evangelical church still faces difficulties. The period that will be considered is between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. It will be shown that the laws imposed by the government had disastrous consequences on evangelical believers.

CHAPTER 4 THE POSITION OF THE ITALIAN GOVERNMENT TOWARDS THE EVANGELICAL CHURCH AND MISSIONS ON THE THEME OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

4.1 Introduction – Historical Documents influencing Religious Freedom

The following information is based on documents written by fascist personalities who clearly describe the environment in which Evangelical Churches and Missions, at that time active in Italy, lived in freedom or, better to say, in restriction and even persecution because of their faith. The documents referred to contain the correspondence between Mussolini and Vatican personalities, the 1929 Lateran Pacts and the 1935 infamous circular letter named Buffarini-Guidi.

It is important to trace the presence and missionary activity of the Evangelicals in Italy, to contextually highlight some peculiar factors which influenced the increase of their presence. Their action had a strong impact on public witness, on the spreading of the Evangelical faith, on the relationship with the RCC and the relationship between the State (or Monarchy) and Evangelicals and the repression exercised over Italian Evangelicals. These are all objective realities which strongly influenced the IEC growth rate. The story does not end here. It will be shown how this paradigm will be occasionally repeated in different ways and with other characters, negatively marking the history of Italian Evangelicals. At the rise of the XXth century on the horizon it portended something new and unexpected though overflowing. It was the beginning of what became a massive movement, characterised by different waves (Introvigne, 2004:47).

Usually, the Charismatic-Pentecostal stream is subdivided into three different “waves” which, from a sociological standpoint, and in their own way, retrace the Protestant history. Each wave grew as a network, protesting against denominations and denominationalism and emphatically declaring that they would never create new denominations. The evident success of the Charismatic-Pentecostal movement inevitably leads to the formation of new denominations which introduced themselves as “something new” from the traditional protestant Churches. Over the decades they abandoned the typical features of protest movements by coming closer to the classical Protestant world. Such (though relative) move toward the centre, of the first Pentecostal wave, produced a consequential second wave, protesting against the falling into the “denominationalism” of the first one. When the second wave was involved in a process of institutionalisation, a third wave started (which called itself “Third Wave”- *Terza ondata*). Today’s sociologists point out the tendency of the third wave’s network to be a denomination in itself while others suggest a “Fourth Wave” made up of independent churches (at the moment, in most cases,

they call themselves “Denominational”) such as Pentecostals, Independent Charismatics and believers coming from an “Evangelical” world once hostile to Pentecostalism.²²

The beginning of the Pentecostal Movement is traced back to the night between 31 December 1900 and 1 January 1901, when a Bible school student, in Topeka, Kansas, began speaking in tongues. Such a manifestation was related to what the disciples experienced in Jerusalem, on the Day of Pentecost. Truly, other sources see in John Wesley the herald of Pentecostalism (Introvigne, 2004:49-51). In time, the speaking in tongues or *glossolalia*, became the first and the only and true evidence of the Spirit’s Baptism and the “*leitmotiv*” of the Pentecostal Church (Introvigne, 1996:22-24). Today, this phenomenology is present inside the RCC, and specifically, in the so defined “Renewal of the Spirit” Movement. This term indicates the spreading of themes which were peculiar to Pentecostalism such as *Glossolalia* (speaking in other tongues) but also healings and other signs of the Spirit’s presence, generally accompanied by a specific theology and the Spirit’s Baptism. (Introvigne, 1996:157-193). On this subject the RCC is quite critical.²³

The new missionary impetus, from the USA, reached Italy when the Italian emigrants came back. Having personally experienced the Baptism of the Spirit with the *xenoglossia* gift (speaking in other languages or foreign languages), at their arrival in Italy they diffused such a message and that kind of experience. The first Pentecostal Church in Italy was founded in Rome in about 1910. The movement spread up to the point that, at the outbreak of the First World War, ten Pentecostal churches were already present in Italy and, in 1928, at the first Constitutive Assembly of the Italian Pentecostal Churches, there were about ninety churches.²⁴

Places where there were churches, especially in the South of Italy, were cities like Raffadali – where, in 1944 there was a historical meeting among the churches belonging to the Pentecostal movement, under the leadership of Vincenzo Federico – Messina, Caltanissetta, Palermo, Riesi, Termini Imerese, Giosa, and Pantelleria (Rinaldi, 2017:43,87). In 1929, the year of the Lateran Pacts²⁵ a law was issued which promoted the non-Catholic cults from “tolerated” to “permitted” (Zappalà, 1997:57-62). The spreading of the Pentecostal Movement was not well received by the fascist regime which began the repression of the movement by imprisoning people, organising police raids and even issuing psychiatric reports. Considered “harmful to the physical as well as

²² Le Religioni in Italia (n.d.). La prima ondata: i "wesleyani". Available at: <http://www.cesnur.com/la-prima-ondata-a-i-wesleyani-le-chiese-di-dio/> (Accessed on 12/03/2018).

²³ Incardona S. Cristiani, dono delle Lingue (n.d.) - Catechesi Battesimo nello Spirito Santo. Cristiani Cattolici. Studi biblici. Available at: http://www.cristianicattolici.net/il_dono_delle_lingue.html (Accessed on 11/06/2018).

²⁴ According to the 2000 statistics the Charismatics (including the Pentecostals) have exceeded 50% of the Protestants all over the world; in Italy, out of 363 000 protestants, 250 000 are Pentecostals (Introvigne, 2004:9-12)

²⁵ Vaticano. (n.d.). Archivio documenti Patti Lateranensi. Available at: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/secretariat_state/archivio/documents/rc_seg-st_19290211_patti-lateranensi_it.html (Accessed on 11/06/2018).

psychic integrity of the race” as affirmed in the April 6, 1935 Ministerial Circular no. 600/158 issued by the Ministry of Interior G. Buffarini-Guidi, the Pentecostals were subjected to harsh repression. From Mussolini’s diary after having met with Pope Pio XI the following:

Protestants maintain a reckless behaviour and talk about “missions” to launch in Italy. The law on admitted and not just tolerated cults, was of great help. In the last census Protestants were numbered as just 135 000, of whom thirty-seven thousand were foreigners. That’s true – said the Holy Father - Italy is strongly Catholic which is a privileged condition even from the national viewpoint; this is why we must be vigilant ... (Rinaldi, 2017:68)

And from the painter and fascist Ardengo Soffici’s declarations in 1923 can be foreseen what would happen soon:

... the Italian degeneration, from the end of Resurgence on, and its acceleration especially after Renaissance, not from other derives but from the progressive absorption, by the cultured classes, of the Protestant mentality with all its negative and mortifying effects such kind of act implies. This is the reason why our Arts, our Literature, our Philosophy, at first lost their native, serene, moderate, realistic character in the classical and ancient sense, and our Morality and Politics were similarly modified. In fact, to what other reason should be attributed the infiltration in a country like ours, substantiated by intellect, wisdom, moderation and elegance, a land of aristocrats and sound minds, the infiltration of liberal and communistic ideas, if not for the incautious opening of our mind and heart to the breath of barbarism moved centuries ago by a filthy German friar revolting against truth and true beauty? And continuing: Luther, the *villandrunk* of strong drinks and arrogance, unable to comprehend the mysteries of the Catholic wisdom, the only one capable to rule the civil peoples, hatefully attacked its foundations with brutal violence trying to destroy the most splendid social, spiritual and religious building of the world arousing all the monsters who then contaminated it. Defining fascism as an antireform movement equals to attributing it the clearest, more natural, higher, more glorious task, that could be given; it’s like opening the doors wide towards the restoration of Italianness, indeed, Latinity that equals to say universality and catholicity (Spini, 2002, 379).

Signing the Lateran Pacts, the Fascists actually refused the Renaissance spirit in which could be detected the possibility of a real change. The door was closed to any aspiration of religious freedom and State secularity (Tourn, 1977:236). The only certainty was the *Regime*’s weighted choice to favour the Vatican as its only interlocutor. In this way the Evangelicals were socially

marginalised, controlled by the government which even assumed the right to nominate their ministers (Iovino, 2014:32-33). Today, there are still limitations for example Spini (2002:382) writes:

The Evangelical Church suffers an unequal and even discriminant treatment from agencies and public institutions. For example, religion teachers in public schools. They are all role teachers, chosen by the Curia and paid by the Italian State. Nobody can teach religion if not Catholic and authorized by the Bishop. Worth of note is that since 1923 until 1984, in public schools, due to a circular issued by the very active Minister of Education Gentile, teaching Catholic doctrine was compulsory. He declared that Roman Catholic religion “has become the foundation and crowning” of the national education.

In some respects, a flare-up can be seen due partially to the suspicious climate triggered by the presence of other non-Christian religious groups, within which there are radicalised elements. In the two brief Mussolini and Soffici declarations, the cultural foundations and ideological orientation which, in Italy, dug a deep furrow in the future generations, are clearly visible. Some expressions, such as “permitted cults” or “Italy is deeply Catholic” and “this is a privileged condition” are puzzling. Even more:

... the Italian degeneration ... comes from the progressive absorption, by our well cultured classes, of the protestant mentality with all the negative and mortifying effects implied in such action ..., and the presumption of the superiority of the Italian race, to be ... a country, such as ours, substantiated by the intellectual light, wisdom, measure and elegance, a nation of aristocrats and healthy minds And still more, to define and preach about Fascism being an anti-reformation movement means to assign it a clearer, more natural, higher and more glorious task ever thought: it means opening the door to the total restauration of Italianness, or better, of Latinity, that is, universality and catholicity. (Spini, 2002:379)

This is the discomfoting picture of the Italian situation which comes from the past and explains the difficulties the Evangelicals faced to carve out a space to survive and preach in Italy. In the late 1800s, the Italians became an object of interest to American and English Methodism which was very active in sending men and means to evangelise Italy. This too was tight-lipped accepted by the Fascists. Why? Because all the foreign movements had always been seen with suspicion; especially at the time of Fascism. All these circumstances slowed down and even hindered the diffusion of the Gospel and the formation of an Evangelical identity in Italy, compelling the churches to lean on foreign organisations. The consequence is that in Italy the missionary impulse was limited until the 1970s when some things began to change.

4.2 The infamous 1935 circular

The Buffarini-Guidi circular, from the Ministry of Interior, was issued on April 9, 1935. The reference to the “integrity of the race” was clear. The circular was part of actions undertaken by the fascist Regime on racial laws which culminated in the 1938 law against the Jews.²⁶ It was the first time in a fascist Government document that the concept of race was introduced. This circular was part of the escalation which culminated in the 1938 racial laws and it is also one of the examples of contiguity between the fascist Government and the Italian Monarchy. Buffarini-Guidi was one of the most influential men of the fascist Regime. He was faithful to Mussolini from the time of the Social Republic of Salò up to Mussolini’s failed attempt to escape to Switzerland which ended with the shooting.²⁷

The pressures of the Vatican contributed to the publication of the circular, Buffarini-Guidi. Actually, in the years around the Concordat, the Vatican was worried about the Waldensians, the Methodists, the Jehovah Witnesses, and the Salvation Army. While the Pentecostals were not considered a danger, the protest was, generally speaking, against the law on the Permitted Cults, pressing for a more liberticidal version, which punctually happened. A note from the secretariat of the Vatican State transmitted in 1934 to the Italian Government, among other things, said:

The Pentecostals or tremolants, deserve particular reporting. During their meetings, the adepts are excited to the paroxysm endangering especially women and children. To make it sure you just have to send a psychiatrist doctor to make an inspection, without notice, in via Adige 20, Roma (...). It is good to remember that the Italian Law allows cults different from the Catholic religion one, provided they don’t follow principles and carry out rites contrary to the public order and to morality. Therefore, we wonder why the Pentecostal cult is still allowed in Italy (...). Its Excellence, the Head of the Government, in the great speech at the second quinquennial Assembly of the regime, last March 18, declared: “Religious unity is one of the great strengths of a nation. To compromise it or just crack it means to commit a crime of injured nation”. Such categorical statement, which should act as a program of conduct for all State authorities, would remain sterile if, at a so serious crime, so authoritatively qualified, would not correspond, in the Law, convenient measures to prevent and repress it. For all other crimes of lese²⁸ Majesty, injured regime, injured nation, the Italian Law has proportionate remedies.

²⁶ Elelorusso. (2018). Leggi razziali, 80 anni fa la nascita del razzismo di Stato in Italia. Panorama. Available at: <https://www.panorama.it/news/politica/leggi-razziali-italia-80-anni-razzismo-stato-shoah> (Accessed on 15/05/2018).

²⁷ <http://lanostrastoria.corriere.it/> - (accessed on 15/04/2018)

²⁸ It means treason

Due to the application of the circular, many Pentecostal churches were closed and assemblies and manifestations, in which worship activities were performed, were forbidden or repressed. There were imprisonments, denunciations and condemnations (Bracco, 202:10-13). Anyway, imprisonments, denunciations, confinement, and in some cases, even concentration camps, did not stop the Pentecostal testimony. Believers' faith was even fortified; they remained steady in their beliefs regarding persecution as a confirmation of being the people of God. In fact, during the time of persecution, the Pentecostal testimony spread widely. The situation aggravated after 1939 when the war propaganda defined all the Protestants as enemies of the Italian State. Within the years 1948-52, there were many acts of intolerance, persecutions and abuses of authority in, at least, eighty different places. Some cases remain emblematic such as the April 6, 1950 resolution of the municipal council of the town of Cavaso del Tomba (TV) which did not grant drinking water to the Italian American pastor Enrico Marin. He was exercising, "in town, the Pentecostal cult which, in addition to being forbidden by the Italian State, impacts the Catholic feeling of the great majority of the local people". Or that which forbade the burial in the common city cemetery of the Evangelical Michele Curci di Trani (BA), who died on July 30, 1952 in compliance with the provisions of the Catholic Canon law regarding the burial of heretics. In this second case, in order to bury the body in the city cemetery, an interpellation to the Chamber of Deputies was needed. Another case happened in Sonnino, near Latina (Roma), on January 1, 1948. During an evangelical procession, composed of men, women and families, some Catholics, holding a huge cross, rushed furiously against them, shouting "Out the Protestants" and "blood, blood". The police, standing there to maintain the public order, did the same. A woman fell down and, her brother, took a gun and fired, killing a man. Afterwards it was clarified that the killer was a relative of the lady who had nothing to do with the evangelical Church. But this was the expected excuse to trigger criticism and persecution against the Sonnino Pentecostal church (Zappalà, 1997:99-120). In the S. Michele Arcangelo parish registers, the following:

January 1st, 1948, bloody New Year at Sonnino. The evil Quaker's sect and the heretical protestants, who have been causing so much concern all over the country ... it happened during that scuffle that a Pentecostal or Quaker took out a gun and fired at the crowd ...
January 2nd, 1948, the funeral of the martyr of the faith succeeded imposing with the participation of all the Clergy, local authorities, the Commissioner, the people" Pope Pious XII was personally interested in this town which wasn't anymore an outlaw's den, but of a more dangerous category of people, the Evangelical Pentecostals.

Another testimony of the tension existing in those years, comes from the Avellino area and more precisely from Rotondi, where in September 1927, something really bad happened. A Pentecostal believer, Aniello Mataluni (Mauriello, 2004:21-26) actively and persistently involved in

evangelism, was attacked by a group of young Catholics, led by the local priest, and dragged to the entrance of a well to be thrown into it; only the police intervention prevented the crime. These are just a few cases of a long list of persecutory acts that happened in the country, from the north to the south of the peninsula (Rinaldi, 2017:200-211).

The circular was not withdrawn even after the fall of Fascism and the appeal for religious freedom was launched, in 1948, by the Federal Council of the Evangelical Churches, which included Adventists, Pentecostals, the Brethren Church and the Salvation Army. The same Pentecostals, who had taken the name of Assemblies of God, in 1948 had already forwarded to the Ministry of Interior the request to obtain legal recognition as a religious institution without receiving any answer even after many appeals. Only in 1954 they came to know that the Court of Cassation and the Ministry considered the Buffarini-Guidi Circular illegal, though not necessarily revoking it. The document remained in force until 1955 and only in 1959 the Pentecostals obtained legal recognition. However, the police persecution against Pentecostals did not stop at the end of the Fascist regime. The reason for the failure to repeal the Buffarini-Guidi circular was the government authorities' will to preserve the nation's spiritual unity threatened by the Pentecostal preaching especially in the South and in Sicily. Such a repression proved to be useless. The coming of the first centre-left governments led to the emancipation of the Pentecostals in the State. The repression did not cancel the Pentecostal faith which experienced a powerful awakening at the end of the Second World War.

4.3 The long journey of religious freedom in Italy

Regarding religious freedom, it is interesting what Tertullian says:

It is inherent in man being an inborn law; religious freedom and liberty coincide. We worship one only God whom you naturally know, whose lightings and thunders make you tremble, and whose benefits you rejoice. You believe in the existence of other gods that we know to be demons. Anyway, it pertains to the human and natural law that everyone worships whatever he believes so that one's religion does not damage or favour others. But it does not pertain to faith to impose a religion to be willingly adopted, not by imposition since even the sacrificial victims are requested to a soul who gladly accepts it. Therefore, even though you compel us to sacrifice, your gods would not be satisfied by persons who are forced unless they love conflict; but God does not love conflict. On the other hand, the true God grants his benefits both to the wicked and to his own. (*Ad Scapulam*, 2:1-3)²⁹

²⁹ Tertulliano: ad Scapulam (2000). Available at: <http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/tertullian/tertullian.scapulam.shtml> (Accessed on 09/03/2018).

But what are the origins of freedom? From ancient times, several attempts have been made to answer this important question. The answer takes two directions: first, freedom comes from outside man or on the other side, “freedom comes from within.” In ancient Greece, freedom was tied to the *polis*: “you are free if you observe the laws”. The same with Hebraism: the observance of the law, of the Ten Commandments, is a guarantee of corporative as well as individual freedom. The other aspect underlines the truth that man is naturally free in himself while, for Gnosticism, freedom meant escape from the world. Christianity formulated a third way: freedom is connected to the person of Jesus Christ and to his spoken Word (Platone, 2008:17-18).

In one of his articles, Giuseppe Platone (2008:41) writes: “to avoid misunderstanding, we immediately specify that freedom is greater than all the churches put together. It is a value of humanity which is conjugated in different ways, in various historical and current contexts. Registered sixty years ago in the universal *Charter of Human Rights*, freedom constitutes a level of unmissable civilization ...”.

Giorgio Peyrot (2013:1) also affirms: “It is stated the Italian identity to be essentially tied to the dominant Christian religion; such an assumption determined the idea that Italian protestants as well as Evangelicals were citizens of an indefinite identity, influenced by foreign creeds and convictions.”

In simple terms, in Italy the path to religious freedom is winding and still not at its end. The first occasion, as already said, happened at the dawn of the Risorgimento, but all the hopes were broken when the newborn Italian State decided, by the Guarantigie (Spini, 2002:75), to reconnect with the Vatican, considered to be a powerful ally. With the coming of Mussolini and Fascism, all the surviving hopes shattered definitively. The “Lateran Pacts”, between State and Church, strangled religious freedom including the Evangelicals’. Among other things, not to be underestimated was the Vatican’s propaganda which defined the Protestants comparable to the communists (Rinaldi, 2017:108). The Pentecostals were considered to be the “minority within the minority” among the Protestants. Whosoever eventually dared to defend their cause would inexorably lose it. Closed to the sad parenthesis with Fascism, a new possibility to review both the Pacts and the issue on religious freedom was granted. A new hope appeared when in the years immediately following the Liberation Day from the Nazi-fascist power, on April 25, 1945, the new Italian Constitution was written. The American churches seized the opportunity to help producing documents to be given to the Italian Ambassador in the USA, Alberto Tarchiani, in which, regarding Christian faith, great emphasis was placed on the close Italian American bond. Due to such a bond, American churches tried to exercise a strong pressure on the newly

constituting Republican government. Frank Gigliotti (1896-1975), an Italian American was asked to write a report highlighting the bond between churches on the two Continents (Rinaldi, 2017:124-142).

The report was handed to the Italian Ambassador Alberto Tarchiani. It is interesting to read the long and detailed paper published, in 1947, in the magazine, *Pentecostal Evangel* (February 8, 1947, pp. 6-7,11). Frank Gigliotti was not a Pentecostal but a Presbyterian pastor with a great interest in the Italian nation. Within the same document was a detailed report on the fervent activity of some churches such as the AOG (Assemblies of God in Italy). One of these, in Catania, hosted an important national convention and a baptismal service of 34 believers (Rinaldi, 2017:117). Italian Pentecostals, especially those more exposed to the city authorities and the RCC, are different from American Pentecostals. Americans had always been living their faith in freedom and therefore for them the RCC is just another denomination (Rinaldi, 2017:107). In Italy the situation is different and the Evangelicals lived in a trench climate. For example, in 1947, Italy was about to launch a new Constitution. The Parliament's left-wing forces aimed to break the Vatican hegemony voting against the inclusion of the fascist laws on the permitted cults excluding Catholicism from becoming a State religion. On March 20, 1947 it seemed that everything would continue in this direction but the next day, March the 21st, Togliatti,³⁰ personally and inexplicably, caused his own party to support the democrats voting together in favour of maintaining the Constitution of the "Lateran Pacts". Among the Communists this choice was valued as a "high example of national responsibility for religious peace and the workers' unity" (Rinaldi, 2017:150). Until today, the sensational turnaround is a mystery. Regarding the religious minorities groups and permitted cults, today's situation is still the same as in the past. It is difficult to explain why, though in the Parliament there have been non-Catholic parties, nobody has ever had the courage to ask the cancellation of the fascist regime laws which regulate religious freedom and the relationship between State and Church (Catholic). Italy has suffered an invasive confessional presence, felt as a monopoly. Today, many politicians and the media system as a whole, arbitrarily attribute to the Vatican representatives the role of being the only interpreters of Christianity. The rest simply do not exist. This is due to the concept that today's politicians have of their relationship with the dominant religion (Ricco, 2005:81). Nevertheless, the Sinneo law, of

³⁰From 1944 to 1945 he held the office of Vice-President of the Council and from 1945 to 1946 he was Minister of Grace and Justice in the governments that ruled Italy after the fall of Fascism. As a member of the Constituent Assembly, after the 1948 general elections, he led the party in opposition to the various governments that succeeded under the leadership of the Christian Democrats party, proposing the "Italian way to socialism", that is the realisation of the communist project through democracy, repudiating the use of violence and applying the Italian Constitution in its entirety. Wikipedia. (2019). La figura di Palmiro Togliatti. Available at: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Palmiro_Togliatti (Accessed on 27/08/2019).

June 19th, 1848,³¹ had stated the general principle of equality affirming that differences in worship did not constitute any hindrance to the enjoyment of civil and political rights and to the eligibility for civil and military positions. Actually, with the Lateran Pact, such equality among citizens, comprising the religious sphere, is declined. The two principles, equality before the law and in religion, cannot coexist in the same State: one or the other must succumb (Peyrot, 2013:99). The Italian constitution, like other liberal constitutions in the West European arena, comes from a long past full of suffering of those who fought to obtain their freedom. The best fate fell on those who suffered exile, but many others were killed, hanged and tortured. Young people must always remember this huge cost in terms of human lives, but it has allowed all to enjoy freedom of the press and thought. It can therefore be concluded that, equality before the Law, among Italian citizens, has been widely disregarded. Regarding religious freedom, there are some articles on other aspects of the same theme: freedom of the press, freedom of discussing religious subjects, freedom of witnessing, worship centres, freedom of teaching religion (Peyrot, 2013:94-102). For example, in Italy, freedom of the press is regulated by Article 28 of the Statute which requires the preventive permission of the Catholic Bishop:³²

“Reading the history of Journalism from Gutenberg on, realises that about books and gazettes a battle broke out immediately, without respite, between Papacy and Empire (Charles V) while, the Sorbone in Paris suggested to the king of France to dismantle printing presses choosing the apparently milder solution to set up a “syllabus of forbidden books”, an idea which attracted (until the XIXth century) the Roman Curia involved in an unlimited struggle against Protestants of various denominations (Lutherans, Calvinists, Waldensians, Anglicans etc.) and against religious freedom which entailed civil freedom (freedom of speech and press). In the Church states the “*libellisti*” were condemned to the gallows while, the “*gazzettieri*” were compared to the “shameless ladies who go by carriage”. There was no printing freedom: anyone who wanted to print a newspaper had to obtain such a “privilege” from the Prince. The history of the unity of Italy, regarding freedom of printing, begins with the 28th Article of the Albertine Statute, issued by Carlo Alberto on March 4, 1848 which became, from March 17, 1861, the Italian Kingdom Statute. The norm of the general formulation, affirms, “printing will be free but with a law repressing abuses”. Only after the Second World war, would there be the first significant legislative provision which would mark a turning point from the Fascist time testifying a favourable attitude towards the restitution to the press of its dimension of freedom rights. It’s May 31, 1946 Rdlgs n.561 which abolished the preventive seizure of “newspaper editions or any other publication or printout” by

³¹ Presidenza del Governo. (2013). Available at: http://presidenza.governo.it/USRI/confessioni/Esercizio_liberta_religiosa_italia.pdf (Accessed on 17/06/2018).

³² Libertates. (2015). Da dove viene la libertà di stampa? Available at: <http://www.libertates.com/da-dove-viene-la-liberta-di-stampa/> (Accessed on 17/06/2018).

the public security limiting its use to the cases of irrevocable condemnation for an ascertained commission of crime by the press (you cannot proceed with the seizure of a newspaper edition or any other publication or printout, included in the March 26, 1848, n.695 press edict if not by virtue of an irrevocable sentence of the Judicial authority.) Such a rule, which recalls the Albertine edict, was launched on the eve of June 2, 1946. The Monarchy-Republic referendum is still in force though substantially absorbed in the third and fourth subsections of the 21st Article of the Italian Constitution.”

It needed, therefore, a new set of constitutional rules declaring freedom without distinction of political or religious ideas. Regarding religious freedom and the right to profess one’s own faith, sanctioned by the Italian Constitution, it is interesting to reflect on a quote/interpretation of Prof. Giovanni Cimbalò, professor of Ecclesiastical law at the University of Bologna:³³

All human beings who, for any reason, live on the State territory have the right to benefit from the provisions of art. 19. It means that limitations in exercising such a right, are constitutionally forbidden, except the case of rituals contrary to good morals. The right to profess one’s own faith is part of the fundamental rights of citizens and migrants and of those who, temporarily, are on the State territory. The exercise of one’s own religion should freely take place individually or in associated form. The associated form is regulated by art. 7 and 8 of the Constitution. The exercise of one’s own cult is unavoidable from the right to make propaganda. The right of proselytism is, thus, guaranteed. Article 19 affirms that, in religious matters, our system is pluralist. Such a choice, being a unilateral act of the Italian Constitution, is independent from reciprocity applied by other systems or nations. Therefore, each religious confession freely carries out its activity in the State territory. The exercise of one’s own cult, privately or in public, means to grant a public space to religion. In order to express their own cult, confessions and believers need suitable spaces to carry out their activity. Consequently, the State should consent and also facilitate the availability of buildings for worship since, in them, activities of religious social functions are carried out. Religious freedom is a founding characteristic of our legal system and it is not negotiable. Limitations to such a freedom constitute a *vulnus* to the supreme principles of the Constitutional order. Such a guarantee of freedom cannot be conditioned by the failure to comply with it by other regulations.

³³ Docplayer. (n.d.). Prof. Giovanni Cimbalò. Corso di Diritto Ecclesiastico. Art.19 Costituzione. PDF. Available at: <http://docplayer.it/19865501-Corso-di-diritto-ecclesiastico-prof-giovanni-cimbalò-art-19-costituzione-a-a-2010-2011.html> (Accessed on 20/03/2018).

Knowing that other civil institutions care for the protection, the development and the inner well-being of their citizens and of their religious ideas, it gives Italians hope. Followers of evangelical faith affirm their loyalty to the Bible to which their conscience is linked, by life or by death. It is of paramount importance to watch over so that nobody might be deprived of religious freedom, as well as of speech and participation, as provided by the Italian Constitution. According to art. 19 “Anyone is entitled to freely profess their religious belief in any form, individually or with others, and to promote them and celebrate rites in public or private, provided they are not offensive to public morality.” Spiritual life is the most important aspect of an individual’s life even more important than press and economic freedom. In this regard it is important to note the kind of relationship recently established in Catania (Sicily), between some Evangelical churches and the local government. A document was drawn up when a memorandum of understanding was signed by the two parties:

“Board of the evangelical Churches of the Metropolitan City of Catania

Catania, July 14, 2017

To the attention of:

-the Mayor of Catania, Sen. Enzo Bianco

-the members of the Municipal Council

-the representatives of the Evangelical Churches composing the Board of the Evangelical Churches of the Metropolitan city of Catania.

Mr. Mayor,

As delegates of the Board of the evangelical Churches of the Metropolitan city of Catania, first of all, we want to thank you for the invitation, the attention and the sensitivity you showed to the Evangelicals we represent here. As preface to this document, we want to expose a brief excursus on the value of the Evangelical presence in Catania. It is an heterogenous presence but with a strong identity, united, inclusive though open to all kinds of internal and external confrontations, when useful for the improvement of relationships and dialogue with other cultural, social and religious local realities. We want also to stress a peculiar aspect of the Evangelical church, i.e. the cohabitation within it, of different souls, different in the expression of their spirituality, different in their historical origin and in the impact they had and still have, in time, on society, representing, nevertheless, a spiritual as well as intellectual enrichment. In short, we consider a relevant value the diversity and multiplicity of the subjects and a guarantee of an expanded and shared leadership. Said

differently, it means that each single church or denomination acts in full autonomy and respecting each other, and, first of all, God's Word, i.e. the Bible, the only foundation on which our faith and devotion toward the only Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ stand, and to which the entire Church is subjected. Going beyond this assumption, we may affirm, undoubtedly, that we find our common roots in the Protestant Reformation movement which, this year, celebrates the 500th anniversary. Reformation that, in its time, and until today, broke the world balance as defined by the ancient historians, in which two only institutions had the lordship on the souls: The Empire and the RCC. Reformation brought back, at the heart of the experience of faith, the Scripture, returning to the single believer in God, his dignity, a unique role and a position before his Creator and Lord. In this regard, we address you the invitation to honour us with your presence on November 25th on the occasion of a conference organized by the Evangelical churches aiming to renew the memory of such an important event whose repercussions are still felt. We, therefore, represent a good number of churches, whose pastors are here, who have freely chosen to engage, by the Evangelical Churches' Consultation of the Metropolitan city of Catania, in a dialogue with such a respectable Administration. We believe to talk to an interlocutor aware of who the Evangelicals are and what they do in this city, since, during the years, he has been present at events in an active and participating way. Our churches, though considered to be minorities compared to other more numerous religious realities, have shown, with determination, their vocation by serving the weak, the poor and the disadvantaged of society, working actively together and sitting at the consulting table offered by the Administration for fruitful and peaceful discussions. Historically, the Evangelical church has always been very active in our city where there are churches of different numerical entity but none of them considered to be of lower value than another. They are present in neighbourhoods, in suburbs, and in residential areas. From an estimate it is calculated that Catania has about 160 churches (behind Palermo that has 170 churches). (Introvigne-Zoccatelli, 2013:20). In these years, the resulting planning and application of each single church, has strongly impacted some social strata of our city Our wish is to continue to be a constant and discreet presence promoting common good, solidarity and basic Christian values that we try to represent the best. A presence opens to a constructive and serious dialogue, which asks to be taken in due consideration as it happens with other religious groups on our territory. A metropolitan city as Catania and, its Mayor, should not underestimate a so important resource so capillary present and creative, as the Evangelical church in Catania has always proved to be. An important clarification is necessary: the Church, i.e. the society made of all the spiritually newborn Christians by the supernatural power of God, makes a humble and efficient service (*diakonia*) to the collectivity and it does not excise and openly refuse any political power

from above. The exercise of power, or of a pressure (lobby) is not part of its vocation. When, in history, this happened there has implacably been a dramatic negative feedback Knowing that the civil institutions too want the protection, the development and the inner wellbeing of the citizens, gives hope though, as evangelical Christians, we confirm our loyalty to the Scriptures to which our conscience is tied for life or death.

Mr. Mayor, in thanking you for your invitation and the time you reserved for us, we wish good work together with your team of collaborators and advisers. We pray God to enlighten your steps and your conscience so that, as the Bible says, all of us may conduct a peaceful life in the order and respect of the civil as well as God's law, Father of our Saviour, Jesus Christ."

The document in question shows that the Catania Evangelical Church vocation, for half a century, is to offer a multifaceted service of *diakonia* to the city proving that Christianity is not a power but a service. Jesus, right before dying, clearly explained it to his disciples (Matthew 20:25-28). Christianity, therefore, is capable of influencing public life from the bottom of the network of social relations. Regarding the relationship State-religious Confessions, the Italian State is trying to react maintaining a favoured relationship with the majority religion with a series of measures to facilitate their profession of faith as, for example: property tax exemption, financing parish-halls, "eight per thousand" from the State for religious projects, consultants in hospitals, in prisons, religion teachers, etc. (Platone, 2008:51).

Silvio Ferrari,³⁴ an expert on Ecclesiastical Law, writes about the term "religious confession", saying:

"For at least fifty years we have survived unaware of it. Fifty years, or even, we could say, sixty years, from when the Italian Constitution introduced into our system the term 'religious confession'; prior to the 1848 Albertine Statute and the 1929 Permitted Cults Law, the word 'cults' was already used. Such a word, in Italian, does not have a negative

³⁴ Professor of Ecclesiastical Law at the University of Turin (1990-94); Professor of Canon Law at the University of Milan (since 1994); Professor of Relations between State and Church at the Katholieke Universiteit of Leuven (since 1998); Professor at the DEA in Droit et Religion, University of Strasbourg (since 2000); Professor of the Master in Comparative Law of Religions, Faculty of Theology of Lugano. Study residencies at the British Library (1976), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1978), the Columbia University of New York (1980); Professor of History of Relations between State and Church at the University of Parma (1973-89); Lugano (since 2003) Visiting professor at the University of California at Berkeley (1994 and 2001), at the Catholic University of America in Washington (1996), at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London (1998-99), at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris Sorbonne, 2004) Director of the Master in Comparative Law of Religions, Faculty of Theology of Lugano (since 2003).

connotation but, in other languages, the English 'cults' and the French 'cults' convey a strange meaning, very similar to the word 'sect' ...".

For the purpose of missionary action and the Evangelical witness, it is of primary importance to clarify the position of the Protestant Confessions. Within the political order, the reference is to two of the basic constitutional principles: freedom of conscience and of religion, individual as well as collective.

4.4 The road to date

Because of the Pact, the Mussolini regime adopted measures to indoctrinate the population, especially young people, equipping them with an "identikit" of the good Italian that had to be a good Fascist and a good Catholic. It should be noted that on the one side, the 1929 law on the Permitted cults granted the non-Catholic local faith communities to be recognised by the State, but on the other hand, submitted them to a rigid police regime. Protestants were accused of introducing a foreign faith and therefore, were subjected to harassment while, on the Jews the dark shadow of the suspect dropped more and more till the 1938 fateful racial laws and later the holocaust. The civil war and the liberation from Fascism in April 1945 opened the way to the possibility, within the constituent Assembly of a new social pact of the anti-fascist forces. The Constitutional Assembly included Catholics and radical communists who, together wrote down the rules of coexistence which, until now constitute the principles of inspiration of the life together of religious confessions in Italy. Art.2 "recognises and guarantees inviolable rights of man for the individual and for social groups where personality is expressed". Article 3 establishes equality before the Law without any difference of Creed, charging the Republic with the duty to remove economic and social obstacles which, constraining freedom and equality, hinder the full development of the human person and the effective participation of all the workers in the political, economic and social organisation of the country. This article is the key for interpreting the Italian Constitution. From here it starts, the red thread that binds everything else and that should direct the reading of the rest of the Constitution Article 19 sanctions the "right to freely profess one's own religious beliefs in any form, to promote such beliefs celebrating rites in public or in private". The only limitation is a very generic offense to public morality. The constituent legislator is very specific in referring to two principal manifestations as proselitism and public ritualism which need to be controlled. At this point the reference is to Art 7 and 8 by which, the Assembly, intended to discipline the relationship between State, RCC and religious minorities. Article 7 is exclusively dedicated to the RCC while Art. 8 refers to the others. The first (Art. 7) makes constitutional the Lateran Pacts, elevating them over the ordinary law; the second (Art. 8) establishes the right of "religious confessions different from the Catholic one" to organise themselves according to their statutes, in compliance with the laws, stipulating agreements with the State for the recognition of

various kinds of benefits. However, it is relevant to recognise that “all religious confessions are equal before the law”.

During the Assembly the debate over the two articles was quite fierce but in the end, the result was not the expected one. There was not a full equivalence between religious confessions and until today, this is the symbol of a poor compromise. The new gave way to the old and, in spite of the new Constitution, observers continued to recognise the position of supremacy of the RCC and the permanence of Catholicism as a state religion. The basic legislation to be applied was, and to this day remains, that of “Permitted Cults”. The June 24, 1929 n. 1159 law and the related implementing regulation approved by R.D. February 28, 1930, n. 289 which the Constitutional Court ordered to comply with the Constitution. All this despite the attempt, in the early 1980s, to revise the agreements with the Vatican, which led, on February 18, 1984, to the signing of a new *Concordato*: finally, the republican and democratic Italy could no longer be considered a Catholic state. On February 28, 1984 was signed the first agreement between the State and the Waldensians. In 1986 and 1993 other agreements were finalised with the Assemblies of God, the Adventist Church, Jewish communities, Lutherans and Baptists. In 2012 the Parliament issued five laws recognising other agreements previously stipulated with Hindus, Buddhists, Apostolics and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints. A religious community requiring an agreement might be entitled to receive a transfer of public funds by voluntary donations that taxpayers can claim in their tax declarations. Following the new agreement, a new financing mechanism of religious confessions, apparently more democratic (in the past the State paid directly the salary only to the Catholic clergy) was established. Anyway, such a system, in the end, rewards the RCC exceedingly. The Government, in fact, grants funds to the RCC to build worship centres and contributes to protection and maintenance of historic sacred places which constitute a large portion of the national cultural and artistic heritage.

4.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, thanks to the review of the Lateran Pacts of the religious minorities the condition in Italy is now significantly improved since there is no more an openly unconstitutional confessional state (with the corresponding penal repercussions). The constant stipulation of agreements with the various national communities is a positive growth factor and a sign of awareness and social and cultural inclusion which sets the stage for a more civilised and hospitable country. Unfortunately, the evidence remains of a society that suffers the pressure of the RCC and its hierarchies still affecting the legislative activity on issues and values that according to them are considered “not negotiable”. The legislator should proceed with careful reform of all those

institutions, stratified in the legislative system, which gives an unjust preference to the RCC.³⁵ In this delicate aspect of public life there are still open and exacerbated questions to be addressed, especially in the presence of the migratory phenomena and related problems such as multiculturalism, multireligiousness and consequent interculturality and religious dialogue. All this happens in a scenario of growing tensions due to the repeated acts of terrorism with a religious background. Valdo Spini makes a simple but clear mapping of the balance between competitors. He uses the example of a three-stories building (Platone, 2008:89). On the highest floor he places the RCC whose privileges are legally regulated by an international treatise (the Vatican is a State in a State). On the second floor he places those churches which have stipulated agreements with the State. On the ground floor he places the myriad of religious confessions which do not want or cannot make or did not succeed in making an agreement with the state. This *plethora* of associations is regulated by the 1929 Fascist law on the “permitted cults”. For the IEC its substitution with a framework law on religious freedom has become a “must.” Paolo Ferrero’s quote seems appropriate:

In conclusion, we claim this religious freedom not only for us but for all other faiths too, so that no confession can impose anything on anyone. We claim it for the laicity of the State. We claim it not only for political or cultural reasons but because of our idea of God, the God in whom we believe, who does not need to be defended by laws but is a God who dialogues (Platone, 2008:103).

In the next chapter the missionary work of the IEC will be addressed in a national context which, due to the migration flows and global employment offer, is rapidly changing. The researcher will evaluate the difficulties but also the opportunities and the means by which these are trying to respond to this important challenge. Moreover, the research will address the need of theological training within Evangelical churches, in a State which still tends to privilege the majority of religious confessions which are capable to influence even the basic school education.

³⁵ Publication edited by the Presidency of the Council of Ministers, Department for Information and Publishing, Department chief, Ferruccio Sepe Salvadori, G. (n.d.). *Libertà di religione in Italia*. Available at: https://www.academia.edu/6976809/Libertà_di_religione_in_Italia (Accessed on 08/09/2018).

CHAPTER 5 MISSION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF EVANGELISATION AND MISSION

5.1 The current International ecclesial context.

Our age is defined for good or for bad by sudden changes and our society is strongly influenced by individualism, secularism and materialism together with other ideologies which challenge God's kingdom values. All of these have a global impact (Cape Town Resolution, 2011:10). The result is a global impoverishment caused by other nations' politics and interests including wars, ecological crises, and climactic changes. The Church's role in evangelism is to talk about truth and justice, communicating hope and love. The Gospel brings freedom to an individual as well as a collective transformation aiming to create a community with an inclusive character. A reflection of this world condition is necessary; therefore, we turn to some important documents which will enable us to draw a total picture of today's Church's role. The documents at stake were issued to guide Christians in the near future (Together towards Life, 2012:33). In the Evangelical field the last one chronologically is the one written in the Lausanne series, at Cape Town in 2010. On that occasion, 4 200 evangelical leaders coming from 198 countries with hundreds worldwide participants were connected online. The goal was to challenge the global Church to testify to the Lord Jesus in every nation, at every social level.

Another main meeting, prior to the one in Cape Town was the Manila Congress (1989), where the Evangelicals met together. With more than 4 000 delegates coming from more than 190 countries. It was another very important appointment in the history of the Evangelical Movement. The choice of a third world country where to meet was very significant since it testified a moving from the centre, from the Old Western Continent, to a Third World country in the far East, bringing much enthusiasm. Another historical document, preceding Manila, is known as the "Lausanne Pact", named after the town of the meeting in 1974, the first evangelical worldwide congress on evangelism. The event which saw the largest participation of Christians is known as a sort of Christian contemporary Council influencing the history of all Evangelism. John Stott (1921-2011) was the main character. From the reading of the documents the research can draw a clear analysis of the situation in which the Church is called to act, endeavouring to contextualise her message to make the good News of Jesus Christ available to all. It restated the importance for the Church to have clear points on which to establish her mission identifying the key subjects to be faced in the next years. Cooperation and not competition is encouraged, as well as relationships and collaborations bringing together men and women happily for the simple reason to spread the gospel regardless of who will get the merit or take the responsibility (Cape Town Resolution, 2011:107,108). These are just a few of the goals of those events. The documents

also contain some admissions of responsibility by the Church for missing at different levels her mission of service to the others (Stott, 2010:67). Such admissions reveal that relationships, internally and between churches or between churches and local governments have not always been idyllically and never positively contributing to a good testimony and to a fruitful harvesting in terms of saving souls. Intentions have been positive (Stott, 2010:53-60).

In Catholicism too, especially with Pope Francis, there are interesting indications and exhortations to reflect on. In the *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 26, 2013, Pope Francis writes, inviting all to a new phase of evangelism. The sections of the Pope's message are indicated in brackets below.³⁶ Replying to these exhortations - Cape Town, Lausanne, Francis - the Church today, should evermore practise what she believes. God called his people in today's situation and the harvest is ready. Jesus Christ's and the Church's love, reflecting his love, will make the difference in every situation (Rhea, 2011:83). The call to unity is urgent and it should be used to strengthen the intellectual work to grant her visibility in the public space, being as a *viaticum* for more relevant future initiatives and cooperation (Cape Town, 2010:7).

Summing up the evangelistic work of the Church, it should be a humble sharing of the Christian faith with other persons. All Christians, churches and congregations are called to be active messengers of Jesus Christ's gospel which is the Good News of salvation. Such a sharing is a gift for all announcing love, grace and God's mercy in Christ. It is the inevitable fruit of a genuine

³⁶ He states that the new phase should be marked by the joy that should characterise the Church walk in the following years (1). It is a hearty appeal to all the baptised to bring, with a new zeal and dynamism, Jesus' love in a "permanent state of mission" (25), defeating the "great risk of today's world", i.e. falling into a state of "individualistic sadness" (2). The Pope invites to "recuperate the original frankness of the gospel", finding "new ways" and "creative methods", not to relegate Jesus into our own "boring schemes" (11). "A pastoral and missionary conversion which cannot maintain things as they are" is needed (25), an ecclesiastic "structural reformation" so that all "would become more missionary" (27). The Pope aims for a "conversion of papacy" to be "more faithful to the meaning Jesus intended for it and for today's evangelistic needs". Treating the inculturation theme, he reminds that "Christianity does not hold one model only" and that the Church's shape is "multiform" (116). "We cannot pretend that all the people expressing their Christian faith, would imitate the way chosen by the European countries in a specific historical situation (118). He invites believers to care for the weak: "the homeless, drug addicted, refugees, indigenous people, old people who are more and more in solitude and abandonment" and the migrants, exhorting the countries to a "more generous openness" (210). He talks about the victims of the new type of slavery, "in our cities are rooted such mafia hateful crimes and many have bloody hands because of their silent and easy complicity" (211). "Women are doubly poor being excluded, ill-treated and the object of violence" (212) "Among those poor the Church shows how she cares, there are, "the unborn who are the more innocent and less protected victims of all, to whom even human dignity is negated" (213). "On this matter, we do not expect the Church will modify her position. It is not a sign of progress to pretend to solve problems eliminating a human life" (214). Therefore, an appeal is made to respect all creation: "we are called to take care of the fragility of the people and of the world in which we live" (216). A dominant theme is the relation between the Gospel message and the promotion of human life in all its expressions. An integral promotion of every person not to render religion a private matter, without any incidence in public as well as in social life. In fact, an "authentic faith implies always a profound desire to change the world" (183). Two important themes belong to this section: first of all, "the social inclusion of the poor" and, then "peace and social dialogue". Two exhortations to the Church are of good expectations: "whatever happens let us not run away from Jesus' resurrection, and let us never give up" (3). Finally, the way Pope Francis indicates is that of a Church that accompanies on the way those who, today, are searching for God desiring to see Him"

faith. Therefore, in every generation, the Church must reiterate her duty in evangelism as an essential part of the way she expresses God's love to the world. How do we proclaim God's love and justice to a generation living in an individualistic, secularised and materialistic world? (Together towards Life, 2012:6). By living our faith in the believers' community, participating to the mission she has been called to. The Church is called to be an inclusive community, welcoming all (Together towards Life, 2012:22).

5.2 The Italian church context currently

Italy pays little attention to religious problems beyond those regarding the RCC. It is not involved in deep philosophical or theological debates on theology, faith and spirituality. The reason goes back to the Counter Reformation times. In opposing Reformed ideas, the RCC took an extreme diffident position well expressed in the Council of Trent decrees. The first result was chronic disinformation. Generally speaking, for the average Italian whatever is not Catholic is of secondary value. The protestant Church appears to him like a giant nebula. Such a lack of knowledge is still present causing confusion and intolerance so that totally different churches are wrongly considered, for example, the historical Protestant churches existing from the XVIth century. Clearly, this way of approaching the evangelical panorama does not take into account historical facts and situations hindering a dialogue in the context of an authentic ecumenical search since the Protestant phenomenon, in its complexity, variety and richness is not well understood. Christian pluralism is an evangelical historical inalienable characteristic due also to the inherent conflicts of Protestantism not mediated by a priestly hierarchy. Divisions is the price paid for freedom. Actually, Protestantism is more united than it seems since the faith setting has undisputed common traits, such as:

- Scripture. No evangelical group can disregard this term of reference for its life and research. Scripture as the whole Bible.
- Christology. One thing is absolutely true: there is no other compass than the message of Jesus Christ
- Every believer's responsibility
- Concept of a Christian community. Faithful believers try to find their path together with others. Some churches are more organised congregationally while others seem more spontaneous. Christian communities have always tried to combine the apostolic concept of solidarity with the brotherly solidarity to men and women.

The Counter-Reformation Italy has been, therefore, characterised by a pluralism first of all among the Hebrew minority and then by the Waldensians. As a matter of fact, in Italy there have always been historical minorities. Italy is not a Counter-Reformed *tabula rasa* but has always shown

valuable minorities. As previously said, the relative religious freedom, established after the Italian unity, attracted important foreign missions. The years between Unity and the First World War do represent a very important time in the Italian religious pluralism history in which, thanks to the large overseas migration, arrived and was consolidated in a new wave of popular evangelical matrix, destined to a phenomenal growth. In Italy, since the end of 1980, political parties began to make a provision for the migration flows and therefore for the presence of different faiths. The process of this provision brings the research to the last few months of 2012 when a new scenery, regarding religious pluralism and agreements with the State, was displayed. Between accelerations and resistances, the process of pluralisation on the Italian religious scenario, is destined to continue. It is difficult to add more since it is unclear how and where the Catholic church will place herself in such a scenario. The impression of this researcher is that a phase of strategic investigation and rearrangement of the Church's presence in a recognised public space more and more will be filled with a plurality of subjects. We are facing a time of transformation even in religious dynamics which will substantially modify the way the community of faith is present in Italy. The context is in continuous mutation rendering impossible an exhaustive analysis. Some data change frequently, even daily (Introvigne-Zoccatelli, 2013:3). Below is a picture of some evangelical realities present on the national territory which illustrate their numerical consistency and their histories.

The Lutheran Church in Italy flourished in the 1500s and was suppressed by the Counter Reformation. Only around 1800 some communities could be reconstituted under diplomatic protection. In 1948 the Lutheran Evangelical Church was formed in Italy (Bouchard, 2006:29).

The Waldensian Church was constituted in the XVIth century under the influence of the Swiss Reformation and since 1555 was accepted in the Calvinist International. While the Counter Reformation suppressed many protestant presences in Italy, the Waldensians created an interesting experiment of a popular church. Since then, the Waldensians gradually and thoughtfully inserted into the life of the Italian people, their social works and their opinion battles which kept her in daily contact with today's sufferings and injustices (Bouchard, 2006:46,47).

The Baptist Church. In 1863 the missionary expansion reached Italy concentrated in the central south of Italy. The 80 Baptist churches form the Baptist evangelical Union in Italy with about 6 000 adult members and a ecclesiastical population of about 16 000 people (Bouchard, 2006:72).

Brethren Assembly. They are present almost everywhere and their history is rooted in the most relevant moments of the Italian Risorgimento. While others entered a dialogue with the high class (The Waldensians) or with political parties, the Brethren devoted themselves to the poorest classes building an evangelical movement full of warmth and seriousness. Fascism was for them

a time of repression. Around 1970 there was a new impetus in evangelism especially in the south (Puglia and Sicily). According to some statistics, the Assemblies count about 10 000 adult and professing members. They were and remain as a movement, one of the most significant movements in Italy (Bouchard, 2006:86,87).

Assemblies of God. The origins of the Italian Pentecostalism go back to the Waldensian Church in Chicago. In 1907 the group turned out to be the first Italian speaking Pentecostal Assembly. After the Second World War the Italian Pentecostals experienced an extraordinary growth surpassing all other evangelical denominations. After being limited to south Italy they spread to the north thanks to emigration. Statistically, there are today about 1 000 churches and groups and 400 pastors. The ADI prints books and magazines and in Rome runs the Biblical Institute for pastors' development. It totals about 100 000 people. Especially in south Italy, to the ADI are connected hundreds of autonomous communities. Since 2000 many of these churches are united in the Federation of Pentecostal Churches composed of 250 local communities (Bouchard, 2006:109).

The Apostolic Church. This movement arrived in Italy in 1928 thanks to some pastors from the Apostolic Church in Great Britain. After visiting a good number of regions in Italy, after two years they sent their first missionary to Grosseto. According to today's statistics there are 47 worship centres and 58 evangelistic stations with more than 3 500 persons who are full members or supporters (Bouchard, 2006:113,114).

To the numerically more important denominations may be added: The Federation of the Evangelical Churches (FCEI), the Federation of the Pentecostal Churches (FCP) and the Italian Evangelical Alliance (AEI). There is also a plethora of Associations of para-churches very active in evangelism, social solidarity and missionary trips abroad (Introvigne-Zoccatelli, 2013:159,160-326-382).

In the context of evangelisation and mission in Italy some "factors" acted as a starting point for implementing a wider mission. The first element is significant personalities such as pastor Philip Wiles (1921-2014), a well-known and esteemed preacher all over Italy (Wiles, 1997:7). He was born in Richmond, Surrey. Wiles was originally a Baptist and in 1951 he moved with his wife to Udine where he was involved in an English Baptist mission named "Spezia Mission". There he began an itinerant evangelistic ministry. In 1974 he accepted the responsibility to lead the community that in the near future would become his own church, attended by a thousand persons. He is credited to have initiated camp meetings for young people, Bible schools, open air evangelism, and meetings with pastors of different denominations. Many of the young people were encouraged to have a missionary "vision". Tens and hundreds of people, at different times,

consecrated themselves to God and to the mission; some left their secular jobs and entered missionary groups active in Italy and abroad. Other Italians began to serve God in the local church with different responsibilities. The ministry begun by pastor Wiles with his associates became a wide network of believers and led to the salvation of thousands of people.

A second important element of change in Italy is represented by the missionary movement “Christ is the Answer”. For many churches it represented the breaking point of a way of thinking and of doing evangelism. “Christ is the Answer” attracted young people’s attention. Since 1975 the Movement is present in Italy. “Christ is the Answer” began and continues to carry out its mission by an itinerant evangelistic activity, moving along the peninsula with a big tent (for many “the Tent”) capable of holding 2 000 people, for evening services. The mission, active in Italy for almost half a century, developed its ministry especially in south Italy – Campania, Calabria and Sicily- evangelising in various towns and cities. Today it is constituted by two distinct and autonomous groups, one of which decided to begin an activity including training and evangelism. The researcher will never get tired of acknowledging its great contribution to evangelism in Italy. The third important element is the E.M.S.I - Evangelical Missionary Society of Italy (Introvigne-P.Zoccatelli, 2013:398) is to be recognised too as being one of the first Italian Missionary Association conceived, developed and managed by Italians and legally constituted and registered in Italy. It was established in March 1997 and officially founded on October 1997. One of its primary goals is the training for ministry by a theological academic preparation. Over time, in Italy, it developed collaborations and synergies with many other churches and associations and drug addict recovery centres. Currently its focus is on theological training and, for a more efficient work, a protocol of agreement was signed with the Pentecostal Faculty of Religious Studies (SA).

5.3 The context in Italy with a focus on biblical training.

The great majority of Italians have a serious problem: they do not read. The theory “you can’t be a Christian by culture” has become the main justification not to study so that if Italians run away from books nobody sounds the alarm. Anyway, the full picture, strictly tied to the Italian politics and society, is much wider. The last Istat detection traces a worrying picture: 6 Italians out of 10 do not read even one book per year. Drastic percentages in the south where only 27,5 % are regular readers (in the north the ratio raises to the 48,7%) but here the research is only looking at cases where only one book is read in 12 months! The ranking indicates as “strong readers” those who read at least one book a year who are the 14% of the population, considering only the quantity and not the quality of what is read. Reading, though effecting the single reader, reverberates throughout the entire population. It is not by chance that the most developed and civilized countries, truly efficient and with a better quality of life are those in whom the percentage of readers is totally higher. For example, Sweden is the European country with more readers:

90% of the population read at least one book in the last year. In Denmark the percentage is 82%. Compared to the 27,5% of South Italy, the difference is evident. European data on readers, see Italy in the lower positions followed by Cyprus. Rumania, Greece and Portugal. The obvious question is “why do the Italians have such a weak relationship to reading”, with the indicator in constant decrease? In the last six years three and a half million readers have been lost. In this analysis, Istat has involved the publishers, who are convinced that the main reason is to be found in the low cultural level of the population (39,7% of the answers) and in the lack of efficient political and didactic proposals to enhance reading (37,7%). Other motivations are the lack of time and the economic situation. In both cases these are factors with no real impact and should not impact, reading. It is the way of thinking that needs to be changed. Anyway, this is the context in which the evangelical churches are called to face the problem, inside and outside the local church. It is now evident the need to encourage reading and therefore knowledge, which consequently will determine a cultural change and regarding Christians, a spiritual enrichment. Today’s Church is facing problems of theological quality and for this reason her guides are called to have a higher knowledge and preparation.³⁷

Important initiatives were taken, useful for supporting biblical and theological preparation. There is a strong need for an educational path, both for theological and academic training. It is necessary especially for Christian leaders. The almost total indifference, in broad sense, towards religion is a fact to be taken into account. It is caused by the rediscovery of man’s intellectual capacity which enables him to reach a new and higher goal offering and at the same time, answers. The various needs dictated by human reasoning compel believers to preach a “credible” Christ. To the needs of reason, is added ethnical as well as religious pluralism strongly present in today’s society. After September 11th and, unfortunately, within a framework of violent contraposition and confrontation, the question on the relations between Christianity and religions has become strongly relevant. In our time, therefore, theology in a cultural setting, cannot escape the task of thematising and clarifying the meaning and the criteria of the dialogue between Christianity and other religious traditions (Albarello, 2018:158-160). Consequently, a very serious intellectual and religious training is necessary (G.Paolo II, 1992:106).

To pluralism and indifference towards religion is added subjectivism, or relativism,³⁸ which has become the judgment parameter of truth. At this point, Christianity should also be philosophically

³⁷ The Vision. (2018). 6 italiani su 10 non leggono. E questa politica ne è una conseguenza. Available at: <https://thevision.com/attualita/italiani-lettura/> (Accessed on 18/06/2019).

³⁸ Relativism is a philosophy which denies the existence of an absolute truth and doubts the possibility of reaching its absolute and definitive definition. In Europe it was known by the Greek Sophists. Later on it was publicised by the ancient and modern sceptics, criticism, empirism and pragmatism. Bing. (n.d.). Il significato di relativismo - Available at: <https://www.bing.com/search?FORM=SLBRDF&pc=SL16&q=relativismo> (Accessed on 25/08/2018).

shared to be able to give an account of faith and explaining it. This is combined with the thought that Christian faith cannot escape the effort to “think” about the contents of its own faith. Disciplines like sociology, psychology, pedagogy, economics as well as social communication science came to the rescue.

They help those who work on theological training in maintaining Christ’s presence in our society. Faithfulness to Christ and the Gospel requires the promotion and transmission of such a “contemporaneity” (G.Paolo II, 1992:108). This is the reason why intellectual training and education go hand in hand with the spiritual one. If, therefore, the simple believers are called to defend and give an account of their own faith (1 Peter 3:15), much more should be done by those involved in ministry. They should have and give value to the intellectual training, education and pastoral ministry. Unfortunately, in some religious contexts, distinguished by a very basic and limited school education, where prejudices still survive, the attempt is to underestimate and even dampen the importance and necessity of a serious theological preparation (G.Paolo II, 1992:105). The commitment to study is not a secondary factor in human, Christian and vocational growth. Theological preparation is, therefore, essential to mission since its goal is to lead to faith. It follows that a theologian must be a believer, a man of faith who reflects on questions about believing. Reflection and faith are interconnected; the difficulty arises between the theological scientific rigor and its pastoral praxis. It does not mean that they are in opposition but both of them contribute to a better understanding³⁹ of faith (Paolo II, 1992:106).

Regarding the scientific rigor in theology, Schleiermacher (Genre, 2008:117) hoped for a reformation of academic theological studies. He strongly affirmed the full right of theology to be defined as a science finding its place in the secular universities. Such an aspect is particularly interesting since, during Illuminism, religion was banished from universities being considered outdated by religion (Battista, 2013: 289-292).

Regarding faith supported and often filtered by culture, Protestant liberal writers affirm that, if we want to maintain faith as an intellectual and cultural choice of today’s modern world it is necessary to reformulate the Creed according to modern knowledge. In doing so, liberals claimed to have saved the church from cultural and intellectual irrelevance (McGrath, 2007:428, 429). Regarding

³⁹ The word “intelligenza” (s.f.) comes the verb *intelligēntia*, coming from verb *intelligēre* (to understand). According to some scholars it is the contraction of verb *legēre* (to read) with the adverb *intus* (in); those who had *intellegēntia* were able to “read-in”, i.e. to read beyond the surface, to really understand, to grasp the real intentions. According to others, *intelligēre* is a contraction of the verb *legēre* preceded by the preposition *inter* (between). In this case, it refers to the capacity to read “between the lines” or to establish a relationship between elements. Wikipedia. (2019). Definizione di Intelligenza. Available at: <https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Intelligenza> (Accessed on 28/07/2019).

the relation between Christianity and culture, Richard Niebuhr (1894-1962) had an interesting thought when he published *Christ and Culture*⁴⁰ in 1951 in which he indicates five paradigms on Christianity and his own way of confronting his cultural environment. The first is “Christ against culture”. This paradigm affirms that there exists a fundamental opposition between faith and culture, a sort of antagonism. This feeling was present in some writers as Tertullian and Monasticism. The instinct to separate from the world and, therefore, from a fallen culture is still present today in some movements. A modern example is the Amish in America which trace their origins back to Menno Simmons. They totally refuse the American culture maintaining many XVIIth centuries’ European rural habits. The second paradigm looks for the “Christ of culture”. Its aim is to adjust and adapt Christianity to the cultural values in force. This involves temporary adaptations which, over time, will suffer new and further adaptations. (McGrath, 2007:426, 427). A third paradigm wants to see “Christ above culture”, trying to find a new synthesis between Protestantism and contemporary cultural concepts, trying to subordinate them to Christian interests. Paul Tillich affirms that “Church and culture are inside and not next to the other and God’s kingdom includes them though transcending both of them”. The fourth paradigm is “Christ and culture in paradox”. A Christian belongs to two very different worlds: temporal and spiritual. Luther worked out a “two authority spheres’ theory” based on a distinction between two kingdoms. God’s spiritual kingdom is realised by his word and the Holy Spirit’s guidance. The worldly one is implemented by kings, princes and magistrates, be they believers or not. The fifth and last paradigm is “Christ, transformer of cultures”. In this case, the main theme is conversion. Christ is seen as the one who converts people within their own culture and not separating them from it. Culture is under the judgment of God. L. Newbegin, in his book *The Household of God* (1954) affirms the necessity of rediscovering a missionary perspective aiming to convert cultures. After exposing the different paradigms with which a direction can be given to the Church's task in approaching the current society and, although it is not the researchers task here to give such indications, it would be considered appropriate to move towards the second paradigm seeking the Christ of culture. Its purpose is to adapt Christianity to the cultural values in force, seeking through them a dialogue and an approach to present Christ to the nations. This involves temporary adaptations that will undergo new and further adaptations over time. (McGrath, 2007: 426, 427). Christians are called to live in today’s society imbued with a culture which varies according to the geographical position.

⁴⁰ H.R. Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, Harper, New York, 1951

5.4 What is the status of Theological institutions?

Particular attention must be focused on requests of training addressed to churches. These requests can come from external institutions as Academies and Theological Faculties or from internal structures such as discipleship schools or Sunday Schools or Bible study meetings. To acquire a theological basic knowledge for ministry in the church; for the necessity of a cultural and ecclesial integration of immigrants who offer themselves for service to the church as a supplement of a theological knowledge within their own professions (medical doctors, nurses, teachers, etc.); for the inward need of rebuilding an itinerary of faith after many personal difficulties; to dedicate one's own time to a training which, for some reasons, he had renounced; for a pure intellectual reason, i.e. to know the protestant culture and theology (Genre, 2008:72-73). Following Genre's outline, a series of motivations can be identified which explains the reason for the training offer. It is starting from these instances that some, because of their vocations, objectives and personal skills, decide to adhere to a diversified formative path. Worth of note is the fact that in Italy Evangelical academic structures suitable for theological training do exist. They belong to different denominations and were created at different times. All of them can offer a very respectable formative programme.

5.4.1 The Waldensian Faculty of Theology, in Rome,

This is one of those institutions. It is the oldest institution in Italy for academic studies of Evangelical theology. Founded in 1855 at Torre Pellice (TO), it first moved to Florence at Palazzo Salviati (1860-1921) and then to the final site in Rome, via P. Cossa, near the Waldensian church on Cavour square. The need of what today is called "training" was felt by the Waldensian Movement from its mediaeval beginnings. Itinerant preachers walked about Europe to announce the Gospel after being instructed by their older colleagues. One of those training centres was situated in a farmer's house in the Waldensian valleys. After adhering to the Protestant reformation, the Waldensians structured their church according to the Calvinistic pattern increasing the pastors' theological preparation. The Faculty is distinguished by two elements: the awareness of its Protestant reformed roots and an accentuated ecumenical sensitivity. Its students are members of Protestant Italian churches with the presence of foreigners belonging to Protestantism and many evangelical students (coming from various denominations), Catholics, or persons just interested in biblical and theological science, not belonging to any church. This composition makes the Waldensian Faculty an extraordinary meeting and dialogue point in a context of prestigious academic exchanges with other public or pontifical universities of the city,

a city which offers an incomparable artistic and historical scenery for those who are passionate about the evolution of Christianity.⁴¹

5.4.2 The Adventist Faculty based in Florence.

The Adventist Institute was founded in September 1940, in Florence, as a theological school. The president of the Christian Adventist Church Italian Missions, pastor Gianluigi Lippolis, in 1929 appealed to the leaders of the organisation for the creation of a pastors' training school who, until then, went to Collonges Sous-Salève, High Savoy, France for their theological studies. Ten years later, on July 10, 1939, in Bern, during the Divisional Executive Committee meeting the opening of a school in Florence, with a 4-year programme, was authorised. Pastor Giuseppe Cupertino, returned from Ethiopia for health reasons and, due to the outbreak of war, unable to return to the mission field, was charged with the duty of directing the newly founded institution. On October 15, 1940, in Florence, Via Trieste 17 the first training programme was opened for Italian pastors. There were 12 students and the faculty consisted of, Director and Professor Giuseppe Cupertino; professors Elia and Alice Bertalet, Mario Vincentelli, and Maddalena Arbore. At the end of the war, the number of students increased and, in February 1947, the Villa Aurora property (a 13th century villa), today's site of the Adventist Institute of Biblical Culture, was bought. From 1958 to 1997, other middle and high school programmes were added to the theological training in order to reach the high school diploma. Due to the agreement between the State and the 7th Day Christian Adventist Church, which became a law in November 22, 1988, n.516, The Adventist Institute of Biblical Culture, acquired a legal personality as an Ecclesiastical Institution legally recognised. Thanks to the agreement, modified the 8th of June 2009, n.67, the Theological Degrees awarded by the faculty of Theology of the Institute, are recognised by the State. In 1992 a Department of languages was added, offering courses in Languages, Arts and Italian culture for foreigners. From 2002 to 2015 the Institute has hosted a master's programme in International Development managed by the Andrews University.⁴²

5.4.3 The Pentecostal Faculty of Religious Sciences, based in Bellizzi (SA).

The Pentecostal Faculty of Religious Sciences is the first academic institution founded by the Italian Pentecostal Movement. Instituted in 2004 by the Pentecostal Federation it became active in 2006, by the administration of the Charisma Foundation which is the federation legal container of the Institution which has its own recognition.

⁴¹ Facoltà Valdese. (n.d.). Presentazione. Available at: <http://facoltavaldese.org/it> [Accessed 01/08/2018].

⁴² Villa Aurora. (n.d.). Storia di Villa Aurora. Available at: <http://www.villaaurora.it/ita/info/storia.php> (Accessed on 01/08/2018).

The idea of a Faculty of Religious Sciences arose from the need of specific formative paths within the Pentecostal world requiring a certain amount of elasticity, in order to combine the need for a theological training with a community praxis and experience. Moreover, the multiculturalism and interculturality of the worldwide Pentecostal phenomenon require a formative offer comprising a confrontation with the growing multi-ethnic contemporary religious scene within which Pentecostal churches and Communities act. In this perspective, the Faculty established relationships and collaborations with different national and international academic institutions intended to qualify the formative offer at the highest levels of methodological and didactic quality.⁴³

5.4.4 The European Nazarene College (EuNC)

This collage is a multisite school with a central administration offering a variety of formative residential and on-line programmes. One of the Italian e-learning centres is in Catania. The European Nazarene College (EuNC) is a Ministry professional institution offering a post-secondary level of education for Christian service. Its aim is to help students to prepare themselves for a vocational activity inside the church or in Christian organisations. EuNC is a Nazarene educational school. It means that, though not exclusively, the programmes reflect a specific Wesleyan theological tradition satisfying the requirements of the Church of the Nazarene to ordain its Church ministers in the Eurasia Region. EuNC offers accredited and non-accredited courses. The Certificate in Spiritual Training (60 ECTS) and the Diploma in Christian Ministry (120 ECTS) are accredited by the European Evangelical Accrediting Association (EEAA) granting the access to the third level of instruction. The Spiritual Training (60 ECTS) and Christian Ministry (120 ECTS) Certificates are not accredited. As already stated, EuNC is a multisite school with a general administration and a large number of local distant learning centres. Members of its faculty live and perform their ministry in different nations while students attend part-time classes in one of the nearest district's learning centres. EuNC serves the churches in Europe and in the Confederation of Independent States (CIS) offering a common didactic and accredited programme. In different contexts, churches face different ministerial problems and challenges, therefore, the EuNC curriculum tries to balance common European and CIS developments with specific national and regional issues. (Introvigne-Zoccatelli, 2013:255)

The teaching of religion is a feature of the continuity of the Italian public school. Despite the succession of governments and forms of the State, from the nineteenth century liberal to the totalitarian one up to the current pluralist democracy, this teaching has never quitted and from the unity of Italy (1861) up to today, it has always marked the Italian school educational and formative

⁴³ Facoltà Pentecostale di Scienze Religiose. (n.d.). | Presentazione. Available at: <http://www.facoltapentecostale.org/facolta/presentazione/> (Accessed on 01/08/2018).

project. The 1859 Casati law (R.D. Lgs November 13, 1859, n. 3725), approved by the sub-Alpine Parliament just before the Unity to be later extended to the entire peninsula (1861) by the annexation processes. This law suppressed the supervision of the ecclesiastic authority on schools and textbooks of the kingdom, though maintaining the Catholic religion teaching among the compulsory classes, entrusting it to the ecclesiastical authority. Moreover, the regulation for the implementation of the law, issued in 1860, introduced the obligation to display the crucifix in all the public schools of the kingdom's classrooms near the image of the King.⁴⁴

So far, the discussion has been about theological training, school education and the urgency of lifting up the level of knowledge but, at the same time, some difficulties cannot be ignored. Now the difficulties faced by the Evangelical church can be understood since culture and scholastic education have been strongly influenced by the dominant religion, i.e. the RCC. It is about religion that most of the conflicts arose during the time between the XVIIth and XVIIIth centuries. All public and private events were impregnated with the religious sense. At that time, the presence of religious people was relevant; in Rome one fifteenth of the population belonged to the clergy. In Bologna there was an ecclesiastic for every 17 inhabitants. With 12 000 ecclesiastics, 5 000 priests scattered in the 400 churches; in Naples it reached 1/28 proportion of population. The ecclesiastics' cultural level, for lack of serious studies and of individual qualitative choice, especially in central and south Italy, was poor. Very few teachers stood out for their ability to teach. In colleges and universities, the vast majority of teachers was made up of eclectics. In 1765, in Venice, noted: "the attachment to religion equals the rest of Italy with very little effect on people's behaviour". People generally live according to their passions and then they go to confession and everything starts all over again. "It even gets ridiculous", as abbot Coyer writes: "the exteriority of religion has so profoundly penetrated into the national culture that every Saturday, even in places of prostitution, a candle is lit to the image of the Virgin and a financial supplement is asked to say Mass" (Vaussard, 2017:90-102). School teaching built on a solid foundation was only for the noble and was provided by Jesuits to the middle-class young people, in colleges or in private houses. There were many colleges, especially in the Pontifical State, in the Kingdom of Naples and in Sicily, and even in cities of minor importance (in Sicily there were 29 of them). For the rest of the population there was no possibility to access school education. Among all, data reveal that in the nineteenth century in South Italy, 80 people out of 100 were illiterate. In the eighteenth century, the percentage was even higher (Vaussard, 2017:139.147). Regarding theological training in Italy, in the secular field, it does not exist at any university level. This lack was inherited from the XVIIIth century when Theological Faculties that were still active,

⁴⁴ state, churches and confessional pluralism-telematic magazine[www.statoechiase.it], n. [25/2016, 11 luglio 2016- (accessed on 05/12/2018)

were dissolved. It was the year 1873. This position was nothing but a form of retaliation, a way of punishing the enemies of the Italian unity, the Pope and the Catholic Church (Genre, 2008:168-172). At the moment, however, it is precisely the church which generates a cumulative offer to the Italian society and this is the most “original” contribution she can give to the country’s social and cultural development. Actually, she proposes herself as the only space for global human formation. Certainly, the Italian public school has to improve but the concurrent affirmation that freedom should be granted to the Catholic and not to the public school, is so trivial that it does not deserve any consideration or comment (Genre, 2008:175).

In Italy, therefore, despite the indications coming from the European Council, to include in the school programmes a non- confessional course on religious education, there is a lasting lack of laicity and a Catholic confessionalism “overdose”. Unfortunately, the European solicitations are not taken seriously, even being considered unreal and impracticable. In reality, the State submits to the power of the Pact (Genre, 2008:168). In a pluralist society, making room for other models and visions should be physiological, but not in this country which has its own specific history and does not allow any space for others.

In the 1984 revised version on public schools’ education, the Pact grants some specific privileges to the RCC. For example, the Church can choose her own teachers, paid by the State, to teach a religious course in a public school. The religion class is optional and students who do not attend it are free to study other subjects or, in some cases, to get out early from the school. In order maintain the necessity of teaching catholic religion, three motivations are highlighted:1) The rooting of Catholicism in our country’s history due to the circular relationship between public institutions and social bodies, comprising religious data. Not only the Republic confirms the value of the Catholic religious culture, but it takes into account the fact that Catholic principles belong to the historical heritage of the Italian people; 2) try to widen the horizon of the students’ knowledge of Catholicism which is a constituent part of our culture. The need arises to conform the content of teaching to the Catholic doctrine; 3) Teaching is for all but its content is referred to Catholicism as well as the teachers’ nomination which depends on the declaration of idoneity by the Church. Many Catholics believe that Catholicism is an integral part of the cultural heritage. A teaching which should find its conclusion, its dignity, equal to other teachings. It is provided by the State but developed by the Church (La Torre, 1985: 133-139) This RCC dominating and conditioning position involves a confrontation on primary and secondary school education, which all religious minorities, comprising the evangelical church, have to accept.

5.5 The way forward: a missional diaconal ministry with a focus on current needs of Immigrants

Jesus began his ministry in the fullness of the Spirit and his manifest to included freedom from oppression, opening the eyes of the blind and announcing God's coming Kingdom (Luke 4: 16-18). Mission accomplished! He did it for the outcasts of his time. So, He meets those marginalised by society, transforming whatever prevents them from an acceptable quality of life including culture and systems which generate and promote poverty, discrimination and dehumanisation exploiting and destroying persons and earth. A Mission favouring the "marginalised" highlights the truth that being in the "centre" means to have access to systems leading to recognition and respect for one's rights, freedom and individuality; while, living on the margins of society means exclusion from justice and from dignity (Together towards Life 2012:15). On the contrary, the Good News of God's kingdom concerns the promise of the realisation of a just and inclusive world. Inclusion favours relationships, reciprocal respect and the sustaining of everyone's sacred values. Furthermore, it facilitates full participation of everyone in the community life. In Christ barriers are overcome to find a common identity under God's sovereignty (Galatians 3:27-28). Therefore, discrimination against any human being is unacceptable in the eyes of God. The Gospel reminds believers of Jesus' promise: the last one will be the first (Matthew 20:16). Proportional to the hospitality practised towards the marginalised, the Church manifests her commitment to incarnate God's kingdom values (Is 58:6) and denounces egocentrism as a style of life; she makes room for God's kingdom to permeate human existence (Together towards 2012:18). Renouncing violence in all its physical, psychological and spiritual manifestations and in the personal interactions with economic, political and social systems, the Church witnesses that God's kingdom is actively involved in the world.⁴⁵

Regarding immigration, in the majority of cases from a social, economic and political and even emotional point of view, it is valued negatively. If, on one side, this is true, then on the other side we should value it in the light of Israel's history and of what God did towards his people. In the Old Testament God used Israel to make Himself known to other pagan nations such as Egypt and people living in the Promised Land. This mission continued with Jesus' coming, He who gave his life for those considered sinners, foreigners, and strangers to the pacts and to Israel citizenship. All of this should make believers think and ponder the motivations of their service towards others, especially foreigners. In light of what has been said it can be stated without fear of contradiction that the Church's service towards the marginalised or foreign refugees or immigrants differs substantially from that of the humanitarian associations (NGOs) since the aim

⁴⁵ Missionary diaconate. (2017): Hope for migrated people (PDF). Available at: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/290784578_Missionary_diaconate_Hope_for_migrated_people.

of the Church is to establish relationships, to offer hospitality showing the value of brotherly communion within the communities.

Today's Church lives in multi-cultural contexts while the technology applied to communication makes the people more aware of a multiplicity of identities and of finalities pursued by other people. At a "glocal" level Christians are called to relate to people of different cultures and religions. Plurality is a challenge for churches at any latitude requiring serious work in the interreligious dialogue as well as in the intercultural communication (Together towards Life 2012:6). Every passing day the need for multicultural evangelism becomes more evident. For example, in the United States 50% of the States are populated by persons of different ethnicity, immigrants. This nation is a large mosaic of about 500 ethnic groups communicating in 636 languages and different dialects, i.e. one out of five USA residents is an immigrant. The other four are descendants of immigrants (Rhea, 2011:50). Just as Jesus developed his ministry in a multicultural environment so the Church has to act today. Believers cannot afford the luxury of a mono-ethnic Church love for the neighbour includes those from a different faith.⁴⁶

This is the starting point or the heart of the Gospel. Those who belong to other religious faiths are and should remain the object of our love, or better to say, of God's love expressed through us. To be a welcoming Church is not enough to be tolerant, but be truly hospitable according to the following simple but fundamental characteristics:

- a) Accepting and favouring other cultures permitting those who come as migrants or immigrants, to be "visible" in the community:
- b) Respecting cultural differences not debasing them or, even worst, assuming /assimilating minority cultures into the dominant culture
- c) Promoting a right interaction among cultures, creating the right atmosphere in which every culture will express itself being enriched while enriching others.

If these simple elements will be present, persons with different cultures will feel to be heartily and not just numerically welcome in a Christian community, developing a true ecclesial communion, a reflection of the Trinitarian communion where unity is lived in diversity. This is an important step towards a true ethnic appeasement.

Anyway, differences and peculiar ethnical traits cannot be ignored or hidden as well as the past conflicts caused by exasperated nationalism (Bosch, 2000:415). Those who are "different" are

⁴⁶ The Gospel of Matthew 22:36-40

often fearfully look at just because they are externally different from us but the Scriptures tell us about “nations, tribes, people and languages” which we will find again at the new creation⁴⁷. This means that God, considering them precious values, will maintain ethnical differences which were only marred by sin. Concretely speaking, one wonders if Christians will be able to influence their nation so that God's values penetrate the dominant politics, and if they are able to offer answers to moral / ethical questions such as life, human rights, poverty, the environment, etc. Time will tell. There is however, still a way of giving new life to the present secularised and lay society by our daily commitment. The “missionary” should, metaphorically, pitch his tent among the people to whom he is sent following the Pauline concept “I have become all things to all men so that I may by all means save some.”⁴⁸

This model of life is the necessary condition for an effective and penetrating testimony, in the here and now, in view of an ideal ever more transcending the present dimension. Salt and light are important elements which change the environment where they are introduced. Changes may happen by:

- Example
- Prayer
- Action
- Evangelism
- Good argument
- Sufferings

(Stott, 2015:106-109)

To show that, despite the “environmental” difficulties inherited from the past and still maintaining their weight, the Italian Evangelical Church, generally speaking, has been able to implement important initiatives, looking at the ways in which the transmission of the message has been made possible. Words must be followed by specific acts of love and acts should be explained by words. Jesus remains the only model of life and proclamation of the Gospel to all the nations (Sunquist, 2013:184-203).⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Revelation 7:9 – 17:26

⁴⁸ I Corinthians 9:22

⁴⁹ Incarnation makes Jesus’ life visible and tangible. This indicates the missionary nature of the New Testament: its message needs to be translated – that is, fully incarnated – in every language and culture. The theological reflection

Today's missionary activity in Italy is facing the problem of immigration. Criminal actions and terrorism (with many violent attacks in several European countries), are producing an unprecedented wave of xenophobic reaction. The debate moved into the Evangelical churches where two opposing sides were formed causing a heated debate on how to help and on the laws that should regulate the entry of migrants into the national territory. Meanwhile, nothing is done to evangelise these people. Some missionary organisations and local churches are working at implementing programmes for welcoming migrants showing a real solidarity.

The following are three already active programmes:

5.5.1 Project 1: "The Church and Urban mission" AGAPE project

Field of action of the missional church is the city, the town, the neighbourhood, the condominium where members of the "church in mission" (missional) live. All is done by ordinary people who do ordinary things obtaining extraordinary results, especially regarding the salvation of souls. In their urban mission, churches can take several initiatives: *coffee houses, pubs, cultural events, listening centres, etc.* Inevitably, not easy to find resources and energies which are needed to achieve even one of these projects; nevertheless, it is equally possible to develop less demanding programmes where we work, live and study. We might say at no cost and "zero kilometres". Mission is intentional and should be daily and pursued throughout the day; it is a delivery (of a letter or a message) done by messengers (*missi dominici*), faithful to the Lord wherever they are sent. In today's large cities where there are difficult situations and problems to be faced like, for example, unauthorised appropriations of nomad camps (Roma communities), immigrants looking for accommodation or in transit, homeless, drug addicts and alcoholics who every night crowd stations, airports, and historical centres. Do not forget the red light and drug dealing districts where crime and juvenile deviance are concentrated. In Catania, since 2008, thanks to the *Jesus Generation* association, a fruitful cooperation of about nine evangelical churches of different tradition, has developed. Some other missionary associations, present on the territory, after a process of selection and training of special staff, have developed a weekly aid for homeless offering them hot meals and clothes, Christian literature and, in some cases even entering in Roma communities coming from Eastern Europe, to offer them the Good News. In one of those camps regular services have been held with some water baptisms. A literacy course for adults and children (using some public-school facilities) was also offered as well as a sanitary service

emerges by the missionary encounter with local cultures and societies. In this sense, mission may be defined as the "mother of theology". New Testament passages reveal that mission is a primary category for our theological and, especially, Christological comprehension. The gospel message, depending on the context and the person or persons, has been various and offered as Good News (*euangelion*). The heart of Christian mission is evangelism: witnessing the Gospel. The Gospel has to be preached and lived, preached and practised.

with volunteer doctors going to the camp while other volunteers take children and women to the hospital for medical check-ups. The project has become an association taking the name of AGAPE (unconditional love) since it aims to demonstrate the kind of love which inspires its members. It is financially sustained by the associates' contributions. Its further development has added a new aspect to the project: the recovery of girls exploited by prostitution. Some Christian women contact and regularly encounter some of them, presenting the Gospel to them, praying together, granting them the possibility to leave prostitution. Some of those girls have left prostitution to have a new start to their lives.

Data emerging from those activities are really interesting:

- Impact on the city especially on the more risky neighbourhoods
- Cooperation with other solidarity associations of the city
- Active cooperation with the local administration and some of its civic bodies (Councillor for social policies)
- Cooperation with national bodies like Caritas, Red Cross and UNHCR,⁵⁰
- Social visibility: interviews released to some local newspapers and private TV stations.
- Birth of a new spontaneous movement involving a good number of local churches, especially young people, offering their time and energies to the project named "AGAPE", divided into three sections: "AGAPE Roma camps", "AGAPE homeless" and "Pink AGAPE". About hundred people are fully involved in these programmes.
- Propagation aspects: Agape project has been so successful to be repeated in other cities, like in Rome, where some churches have reproduced the same path of witness and social solidarity
- Sharing the missionary vision with other churches in Catania while giving a strong testimony of unity among different religious confessions.

5.5.2 Project 2: Humanitarian Corridors

The project – made possible by the agreement reached among the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Interior, the S. Egidio Community, the Evangelical Church Federation in Italy (ECFI) and the

⁵⁰ High Commissioner of the United Nations for Refugees

Waldensian Table - envisions the arrival, in two years, of about a thousand people not only from Lebanon but from Morocco and Ethiopia as well.

This morning, after two months of preparation and constructive dialogue with the interested authorities, during a press conference, the two organisations announced the start of a project with the intent to open humanitarian corridors from Lebanon, Morocco and Ethiopia. A thousand people are expected and they, thanks to the release of visas for humanitarian reasons will be allowed to safely enter in Italy. The project which has a strong ecumenical dimension, is largely financed by the eight per thousand of the Waldensian Table⁵¹ and, therefore, with no financial burden for the State. Eight per thousand (often abbreviated as 8x1000) is the income tax amount subjected to IRPEF which the Italian State distributes, according to the choices done in the tax declaration, to the religious confessions which stipulated the Agreements with the State. It was introduced by art. 47 of the 20 of May 1985 law n. 222. In 1993 the Waldensian and Methodist church decided to use the law accepting the IRPEF eight per thousand. It was decided that the obtained sum would be used not for worship purposes or for maintaining pastors and church activities, but only for social and cultural welfare programmes, leaving 30% of the total for projects in developing countries, cooperating with international religious and lay associations. Due to an agreement among FCEI, Sant'Egidio and the Waldensian Table with the responsible authorities, the project, helping the refugees to minimize the risks during the journeys of despair, can start today. Satisfaction for the reached result has been expressed by the FCEI and S. Egidio presidents, in the persons of pastor Luca Maria Negro ad Marco Impagliazzo, who underlined the absolute novelty of the solution that might become a model for other Schengen countries. "It is a good practice for Italy and for Europe. It is also a happy coincidence that this decision comes right before the International Migrant Day. We thank the Italian authorities - said pastor Negro - for the care showed in accepting to evaluate the proposal to open human corridors for refugees and other vulnerable people concentrated in Morocco, Lebanon and Ethiopia. I do also thank the Waldensian Table for the generous contribution given to the project, since the programming phase, when everything seemed as difficult as climbing a mountain. Pastor Eugenio Bernardini, chairman of the Waldensian Table, replied saying: "Yesterday we just put a simple signature, but this is the fruit of hundreds of thousands of Italian contributors desiring to give their eight per thousands to the Methodist and Waldensians Churches. Behind the agreement there is the church's diaconal action, the commitment of many

⁵¹ Wikipedia. (2019). Otto per mille. Available at: https://it.wikipedia.org/wiki/Otto_per_mille#Soggetti_beneficiari (Accessed 25/08/2019).

communities, of many men and women welcoming hundreds of refugees. By opening human corridors, our commitment will grow and we are happy to ecumenically share it: it is an important signal of the new ecumenical season in which we live.⁵²

5.5.3 Project 3: Refuge centre for immigrants

This project is called “Refuge centre project” and it started in Genoa on June 2015 under the direction of the Apostolic Church in Italy. The founder is pastor Alberto Di Stefano who, unfortunately, died in January 2018. The Prefecture of Genoa took the initiative inviting the Apostolic church to participate in a call for proposals aimed at hosting and reintegration projects for immigrants. At that time, in Italy, there was a real immigrant emergency for which the State, in Genoa, expanded collaboration with the evangelical churches. The RCC had already obtained permission to administer those funds allocated for hosting immigrants in Italy, even transient. The Genoa Apostolic Church hosted, initially, 12 persons in its sanctuary. Things changed when the Prefecture asked the church to host 30 persons. It was necessary to find a more adequate location. Today’s centre is capable of hosting about 68 people both men and women. The great majority of the guests, usually Christian, comes from Nigeria; the rest of the group is formed by people, of Muslim faith, coming from Morocco. There was also a case of adoption, by an Italian Evangelical family, of the only minor in the group present at the centre. Some of the guests, voluntarily, attended the religious services in the Apostolic chapel and, about fifteen of them testified of their faith in Christ and were baptised as Christians. There are 15 volunteers involved in different tasks.

The tasks are well distributed. In fact, besides the classical professional figures provided for in the contract, there are employees in the kitchen, cleaning etc. The personnel are also offering sewing, cooking, personal hygiene and Italian language classes. The centre offered Gospel concerts and during Christmas, time took the opportunity to explain the meaning of Christmas to the Christians. An important aspect is also the neighbourhood involvement in some activities. All were invited to the concert or to dialogue meetings; children were involved in soccer tournaments with immigrants. All of this created so much clamour that some local newspapers reported the news. The district where the centre is located is a poor one, inhabited by families coming from southern Italy who moved to Genoa looking for a job. They are mostly composed of low-class workers. This aspect favoured their acceptance of the work done by the centre since most of them

⁵² Chiesa Evangelica Valdese. (2015) NEV Notizie evangeliche. Unione delle chiese metodiste e valdesi. Corridoi umanitari per i profughi. Available at: https://www.chiesavaldese.org/aria_articles.php?ref=318 (Accessed on 01/08/2018).

had personally experienced the trauma caused by change and by the removal from their homeland. Besides the Apostolic church, other Evangelical communities were invited to participate in the project. Many of them, from the beginning, accepted to host a certain number of immigrants.

Unfortunately, soon, most of them abandoned the project. The centre receives a fixed amount of money per hosted immigrant and it has to provide for all their individual necessities, from clothing to food, from health care to reintegration into work, including the management costs of the facility. Some of the immigrants completed their professional studies and will soon be hired by a hotel with various tasks. A project is in progress for building a multifunctional hall for meetings, concerts, theatre work, play activities for children in the neighbourhood, afterschool, baby-sitter for working parents who have no money to pay a kindergarten, and for church services. The project should be completed in 2019.

Recently, it seems that another evangelical denomination has received permission to begin a similar project. It is the AOG (Assemblies of God in Italy) which received the convention. The association is called ALDEA.⁵³ ALDEA is an ONLUS created, in Genoa, on November the 10th. It works in the Genoa area but also at regional as well as at district level, actively cooperating with various current realities, especially with the Evangelical Churches of the Assemblies of God in Italy, the Genoa Apostolic Church and many other evangelical organisations. Also especially with local institutions such as the Prefecture, the Municipality and the City halls. Projects and workshops are directed to different categories of persons like: foreigners, homeless migrants, asylum seekers, needy persons, children and young people passing through a material uncomfortable situation, and families, single mothers, etc.

5.6 A way forward: summarising

In the Italian situation, it is urgent to open new perspectives so that new generations might grow in knowledge and not in neglecting other religions; this is a cultural duty which pertains, first of all, to school and secondly, to the communities of faith (Genre, 2008:44)

A new type of catechetical education is needed, a new paradigm centred on the personal identity, the life's search for meaning and direction and new ways of communication (language) (Genre, 2008:59). The theological institutions must be urged to find a synthesis between gospel and culture, to better understand the difficult processes to make them viable. This will contribute to

⁵³Aldea ONLUS. (n.d.). Associazione di Volontariato Genova. Available at: <https://www.aldeanonlus.org/cose-aldea/> (Accessed on 21/06/2019).

denying the belief that the Gospel truth can be discovered by faith only, i.e. without any reference to time and culture. Consequently, there cannot be a faith not culturally mediated, for the simple reason that it is impossible to access the truth of the Gospel independently from man's practical-historical condition.

Theological thinking should find its centre in adhering to Jesus, and the wisdom of God (1 Cor 2:16), the only source which, as the apostles say, is the cornerstone and stumbling stone even for his disciples. In fact, Christ offers Himself as the only condition to all cultures, without coinciding with a specific one, not even with the European or the Western one. Christian culture is not taken for granted but it is desirable that in every age the Church exercises an influence on man's culture (Albarelo, 2018:131).

Besides a return to the Gospel, training needs to be considered a therapy to free Christians from their own ignorance (Battista, 2013:191). Some Catechisms, in fact, under the formative aspect, have aroused great interest. One of those is Luther's "Small Catechism", written in 1529 and addressed to the youth. It was written to counteract people's ignorance due, largely, to the inability of the pastors to teach.⁵⁴

He attributed great importance to teaching and preaching, i.e. to training. To this end he dedicated his best energies.²⁰ In the western world, in the second half of the previous century, after the sixty-eight revolution (1968), a new opening to the theological reflection has been registered. However, churches remained quite indifferent to the external reality even entering into conflict with Academic centres retained to be places for politicising the church and faith with youth and generally speaking with adults' training.

Training, therefore, takes a central role in pastoral ministry (Genre, 2008:120). Intellectual theological training and spiritual life meet together and strengthen each other without detracting any value of a life of research and prayer, as St. Bonaventure declares.⁵⁵ Theology, therefore,

⁵⁴ "The deplorable, miserable situation, which I have come to know as a visitor, compelled me to write this catechism or Christian doctrine, in a short and simple way. Oh God, how much misery I saw! The common man does not know anything about Christian doctrine ... many pastors are almost inept and unable to teach; nevertheless, all of them, are to be called Christians, and be baptized receiving the Sacraments, but they do not know our Father, the Creed and the Commandments" *The Short Catechism*, pp.21-22. Luther himself, moreover, reminds us, saying: "The ... very serious shortcomings concerning the basic training, the comprehension of the evangelical message and its ethical consequences" (Short Catechism, 2015:7). The reason for it all is to be traced back to the fact that pastors were none other than former priests used to perform a liturgical function who were given a responsibility for preaching which requires, anyway, a good theological preparation they did not have. This all to say that a protestant pastor is, first of all, one who helps the community to read the Scriptures. To achieve this purpose, no effort will ever be enough.

⁵⁵ "Nobody believes that a reading without unction is enough, speculation without devotion, research without amazement, observations without exultation, activity without piety, science without charity, intelligence without

has much to do with practical life and the theologian should always confront himself with it, with passion and commitment, not isolating himself in his intellectual world made of study and meditation. When Luther left the monastery in which he had entered and went back into the world, “the world was returned to practical theology and to the practice of theology” (Genre, 2008:118).

humility, study without divine grace, investigation without the wisdom of the divine inspiration.” *Itinerarium mentis in Deum*, Prol., n. 4: *Opera omnia*, tomus V, *Ad claras aquas* 1891, 296

CHAPTER 6 RECAPITULATING

The reasons that inspired this research are all reducible to the theme of the mission or evangelisation in the Italian Evangelical Church (IEC). Italy is a nation with a history that goes back to the first centuries of the Christian era, although much of it belongs to the Roman Catholic origin, which is influenced by many different cultures from all continents of the world, all of which have left a mark and contributed to make the nation what it is now. For this reason, and within this context, the Italian Evangelical church witnesses ministry needs to find a place and a way of co-operation, proposing new methodological and relational instruments.

What were the difficulties and the influences encountered by IEC in developing missionary / evangelistic work in fulfilment of its missionary vision dialoguing with the diverse and complex evangelical world?

In framing the topic, it is necessary to begin by looking to the *missio Dei* as a primary concept rediscovered and applied to today's missiological contexts with all its imaginable applications. *Missio Dei* is peculiar to God while *propagatio* (Bosch, 2000:349), in spite of human limits and insufficiencies, is entrusted to all Christians.

The invitation is to rediscover the missionary practice which begins in God Himself. In Christ and by the work of the Spirit, God does give birth to the missional Church. Her nature, ministry and organisation, come from the power and will of God. The missional Church is Missionary by her own nature.⁵⁶ Actually, *missio Dei*, represents the starting point from where other missions come.

What is the position of the Italian Evangelical Church in the missionary praxis? Italy, among Evangelicals, besides the territorial expansion of the Catholic Church, did not display a great missionary outburst. When the message of the Gospel reached people, the limits as well as the conditionings, emerged as never before: a) the permanent and all influencing presence of the Catholic Church; b) the inner weaknesses of the Evangelical front; c) historical-political events. Surely, the beginning and development of such a change was not easy.

In the XIIIth century there were weak but meaningful signals of a change, anticipating what, in the XVIth century Europe, was defined as the "Protestant Reformation" (see pages 59-67).

The first traces of the Protestant presence in Italy can be detected in the Valleys of the Cozie Alps, dating back to 1200, which can be considered a bulwark against the rampant persecutions.

⁵⁶ Gelder, V. & Craig. (2007). The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit [Kindle Ed.]. Available at: <https://www.amazon.com>

Waldensio (Waldo) preached the gospel independently from the Catholic authority and permission. It was a preaching faithful to the Scripture (the Gospels) translated into the common language of the people of his country and copied extensively, He did not want to establish a new Church order or a fraternity considering the group of people gathered around him, as just “friends united in missionary work”. (Tourn, 1977:14-17).

The irruption of Protestantism in Italy did not only represent the coming of a new religious phenomenon or a variation from what until then had been considered Christian faith, but a revolutionary, radical new event. It was a change of civilization which engaged all levels of the society. The Lutheran ideas spread rapidly through the commercial routes and Alpine passes. Regions such as Piedmont, Lombardy, Veneto, Friuli and Trentino were the access doors into Italy.

In 1560 an edict was issued by Emanuele Filiberto marking, officially, the beginning of the persecution against the Waldensians. The freedom of conscience was abrogated at the risk, for the first time, of a fine or of a life sentence just for listening to the Lutheran ministers. In 1561, entire villages were destroyed from the north (Provence) to the south (Calabria). Protestantism could do nothing against the excessive power of the RCC.

Reformation was followed by Counterreformation. Pope Paul III renewed the Inquisition following the Spanish pattern (Heussi-Miegge, 1984:205). All the Italian evangelical movements were annihilated remorselessly. Chronicles of those times tell of tragedies which occurred in the Calabria Waldensian colonies, of the forced catholicisation of the Waldensians in Puglia and of the martyrdom of some prominent Calvinists (Caponetto, 1997:365). The *reconquista* meant the doctrinal, disciplinary and moral restoration of the RCC. Directions, which lasted for almost 18 years, were given at the Trent Council. Scaring people, the Counterreformation managed to subdue the press, the printing presses, academies and universities. The various Italian states had to accept the situation (Caponetto, 1997:367) for more than 200 years.

On February 8, 1848 the Albertine Statute (Tourn, 1977:200 ff.) introduced an innovative element concerning the “Waldensians” welcomed by the Protestants as a sort of release from the Catholic yoke. A half-win, nevertheless. Here follows Article 1 of the Statute: “The Roman Catholic Apostolic Church, is the sole official State religion. The other existing forms of worship, in conformity with the law, are tolerated.” In this way, while degrading all the other religious confessions as “tolerated cults”, a place of absolute importance was granted to the RCC (Spini,

2002:74). On February 17, 1848, King Charles Albert introduced the “Letters Patent” by which civil rights were granted to the Waldensians⁵⁷. However, these were civil and not religious rights.

Another important Italian historical as well as religious date, was September 20, 1870. The capture of Rome (Breccia di Porta Pia, 20 September 1870) brought new political as well as religious hopes. Many considered it the end of an age, a long age, of undisputed RCC dominion. The “Breccia of Porta Pia” was viewed as the expression of the Italian liberal and evangelical resurgence (Spini, 2002:195). From 1789 to 1875, in obedience to the Great Commission, there was a worldwide explosion of Missionary enterprise by Anglo-Saxons and American churches and organisations that sent missionaries into various parts of the world. Among these lands was Italy which, after the 1861 collapse of the Papacy and by the efforts of foreign missionaries belonging to well established denominations, experienced the rise of Evangelical churches. Despite this relevant missionary zeal, history tells that in spite of the capture of Rome, with much disappointment to those Evangelicals who had overloaded this event with hope, nothing changed. In fact, the new Italian Government was only concerned with regularising its relations with the Holy See. The Chamber of Deputies’ reply was the approval of the Agenda confirming the tolerance of cults other than the State religion. In practice, at any moment, the State could deprive the Evangelicals of the little “conditional” freedom they had. The years between 1871 and 1901 represent a *stasis* of the advance of Italian Protestantism. A 1886 publication (*L'Italia evangelica*, IX 1889, n.2:12) states: “Frankly, we have to admit that the evangelisation in Italy is not thriving. If here there is progress, in other places there is regress; if here there is fiery zeal, the same is extinguished there. We might accuse superstition, indifference, corruption, mundanity of the age and all other God’s and Gospel’s enemies, but we have also failed in many things.”

Signing the Lateran Pacts, the Fascists actually refused the Renaissance spirit in which it could be detected the possibility of a real change. The Evangelicals were socially marginalised, controlled by the government which even assumed the right to nominate their ministers (Iovino, 2014:32-33). The pressures of the Vatican contributed to the publication of the circular, Buffarini - Guidi. Actually, in the years around the Concordat, the Vatican was more worried about the Waldensians, the Methodists, the Jehovah Witnesses, and the Salvation Army, while the Pentecostals were not considered a danger. The silent protest was, generally speaking, against the law on the Permitted Cults, pressing for a more liberticidal version, which punctually happened. In simple terms, in Italy the journey to religious freedom was winding and difficult to follow.

⁵⁷ Chiesa Evangelica Valdese (n.d.) Unione delle Chiese metodiste e valdesi. Available at: <https://www.chiesavaldese.org/> (Accessed on 14/03/2018).

The first occasion, as already said, happened at the dawn of the Risorgimento, but all the hopes were broken when the newborn Italian State voted in favour of the Guarantigie (Spini, 2002:75). With the coming of Mussolini and Fascism, all the surviving hopes were definitively shattered. The “Lateran Pacts,” between State and Church, strangled religious freedom including the Evangelicals. The Pentecostals were considered to be the “minority within the minority” among the Protestants. Whosoever eventually dared to defend their cause, would inexorably lose it!

Today’s situation is still the same as in the past. It is difficult to explain why, though in the Parliament there have been non-Catholic parties, nobody has ever had the courage to ask the cancellation of the Fascist regime’s laws which regulate religious freedom and the relationship between State and Church (Catholic). Italy has suffered an invasive confessional presence, felt as a monopoly. Today, many politicians and the media system as a whole, arbitrarily attribute to the Vatican representatives the role of being the only interpreters of Christianity. The rest, simply, do not exist. The Italian constitution, like other liberal constitutions in the West European Countries, comes from a long past full of suffering of those who fought to obtain their freedom. The better fate fell on those who suffered exile, but many others were killed, hanged and tortured. Young people must always remember this huge cost in terms of human lives which allowed all of us to enjoy freedom of the press and thought. It can, therefore, be concluded that equality before the Law among Italian citizens, has been widely negated as Silvio Ferrari,⁵⁸ an expert on Ecclesiastical Law, writes when addressing the term “religious confession”, saying:

For at least fifty years we have survived unaware of it. Fifty years, or even, we could say, sixty years, from when the Italian Constitution introduced into our system the term “religious confession”; prior to the 1848 Albertine Statute and the 1929 Permitted Cults Law, the word “cults” was already used. Such a word, in Italian, does not have a negative connotation but, in other languages, the English “cults” and the French “cults” convey a strange meaning, very similar to the word “sect”

There was not a full equivalence among religious confessions and until today, this is the symbol of a poor compromise. Despite the new Constitution the “new gave way to the old” while the RCC

⁵⁸ Professor of Ecclesiastical Law at the University of Turin (1990-94); Professor of Canon Law at the University of Milan (since 1994); Professor of Relations between State and Church at the Katholieke Universiteit of Leuven (since 1998); Professor at the DEA in Droit et Religion, University of Strasbourg (since 2000); Professor of the Master in Comparative Law of Religions, Faculty of Theology of Lugano. Study residencies at the British Library (1976), the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (1978), the Columbia University of New York (1980); Professor of History of Relations between State and Church at the University of Parma (1973-89); Lugano (since 2003) Visiting professor at the University of California at Berkeley (1994 and 2001), at the Catholic University of America in Washington (1996), at the Institute of Advanced Legal Studies in London (1998-99), at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes (Paris Sorbonne, 2004) Director of the Master in Comparative Law of Religions, Faculty of Theology of Lugano (since 2003).

maintained a role of supremacy as the state religion. The basic legislation applied until today is that of the “Permitted Cults” and the June 24, 1929 n. 1159 law and the related implementing regulation approved by R.D. February 28, 1930, n. 289 which the Constitutional Court ordered to comply with the Constitution. All of this despite the attempt, in the early 1980s, to revise the agreements with the Vatican, which led, on February 18, 1984, to the signing of a new Concordat by which the republican and democratic Italy could no longer be considered a Catholic State.

Pondering on the current situation, this age is defined, for good or for bad, by sudden changes while the society is strongly influenced by individualism, secularism and materialism together with other ideologies which challenge God’s kingdom values and have a global impact (Cape Town Resolution, 2011:10). The result is a global impoverishment caused by other nations’ politics and interests including wars, ecological crises, and climactic changes. The Church’s role in evangelism is to talk about truth and justice, communicating hope and love. A reflection on this world’s condition is necessary. In the Evangelical field, the last attempt, chronologically, is the one written, in the Lausanne series, at Cape Town in 2010. On that occasion, 4200 evangelical leaders coming from 198 countries with hundreds of worldwide participants were connected online. The goal was to challenge the global Church to testify the Lord Jesus in every nation at every social level. Another main meeting, prior to the one in Cape Town was the Manila Congress (1989), where the Evangelicals met with more than 4 000 delegates coming from more than 190 countries, it meant another very important appointment in the Evangelical Movement’s history. Another historical document, preceding Manila, is known as the “Lausanne Pact”, named after the town of the meeting in 1974, the first Evangelical worldwide congress on evangelism. The event which saw the largest participation of Christians is known as a sort of Christian contemporary Council influencing the history of all Evangelism. It restated the importance for the Church to have clear points on which to establish her mission identifying the key subjects to be faced in the following years. Cooperation and not competition was encouraged, as well as relationships and collaborations bringing together men and women, happy for the simple reason to spread the gospel regardless of who would get the merit or take the responsibility (Cape Town Resolution, 2011:107,108).

In Catholicism too, especially with Pope Francis, there are interesting indications and exhortations for a deeper reflection. In the *Evangelii Gaudium*, November 26, 2013, Pope Francis writes, inviting all to a new phase of evangelism marked by the joy that should characterise the Church walk in the following years (1) (The sections of the statement are indicated in brackets)

He invites all to care for the weak, the “homeless, drug addicted, refugees, indigenous people, old people who are more and more in solitude and abandonment” and the migrants, exhorting the countries to a “more generous openness” (210). He talks about the victims of the new type of

slavery: “in our cities is rooted such a mafia of hateful crime and many have bloody hands because of their silent and easy complicity” (211). “Women are doubly poor being excluded, ill-treated and an object of violence” (212) “Among those poor the Church shows how much she cares for “the unborn who are the more innocent and less protected victims of all, to whom even human dignity is negated” (213).

Replying to these exhortations - Cape Town, Lausanne, Manila, Pope Francis - the Church today, should evermore practise what she believes. God called His people in today’s situation and the harvest is ready. Jesus Christ’s and the Church’s love, reflecting God’s love, will make the difference in every situation (Rhea, 2011:83). The call to unity is urgent and it should be used to strengthen the intellectual work to grant her visibility in the public space, being as a *viaticum* for more relevant future initiatives and cooperation (Cape Town, 2010:7).

Italy pays little attention to religious problems beyond those regarding the RCC. It is not involved in deep philosophical or theological debates on theology, faith and spirituality. The first result is chronic disinformation. Generally speaking, for the average Italian whatever is not Catholic is of secondary value. To him, the Protestant church appears as a giant nebula. Such a lack of knowledge, still present today, produces confusion and intolerance so that totally different churches are wrongly considered, as it is the case of the historical Protestant church though existing from the XVIth century.

The existing Christian pluralism is an evangelical historical inalienable characteristic of our country due also to the inherent conflicts of Protestantism not mediated by a priestly hierarchy. The price paid for freedom is divisions. As a matter of fact, in Italy there have always been countless historical minority groups. Italy is not a Counter-Reformed *tabula rasa* but has always shown numberless, though valuable, minorities “well divided” among them!

As previously said, the relative religious freedom established after the Italian unity, attracted important foreign missions. The years between Unity and the First World War represent a very important time in the Italian religious pluralistic history which, thanks to the large overseas migration, produced a new wave of popular evangelical matrix, destined to a phenomenal growth.

In the context of evangelisation and mission in Italy some “factors” acted as a starting point for implementing a wider mission. The first was the presence of significant personalities such as pastor Philip Wiles (1921-2014), a well-known and esteemed preacher throughout Italy (Wiles, 1997:7).

A second important element of change in Italy was the missionary movement “Christ is the Answer”. For many churches it represented the breaking point of a way of thinking and of doing

evangelism. “Christ is the Answer” caught the young people’s attention. Since 1975 the Movement is present in Italy. The third element is the E.M.S.I - Evangelical Missionary Society of Italy recognised as one of the first Italian Missionary Association conceived, developed and managed by Italians and legally constituted and registered in Italy. It was established in March 1997 and officially constituted on October 1997.

Once again, the great majority of Italians have a serious problem: they do not read. The theory “you can’t be a Christian by culture” has become the main justification not to study so that if Italians run away from books nobody sounds the alarm. Anyway, the real picture, strictly tied to the Italian politics and society, is much wider. The last Istat⁵⁹ detection traces a worrying situation: 6 Italians out of 10 do not read even one book per year. This is the context in which the Evangelical churches are called to face the problem, inside and outside the local church. The need is therefore evident, to encourage reading and, consequently, knowledge for determining a cultural change, and regarding Christians, a spiritual enrichment. Today’s Church is facing problems of theological quality and for this reason her guides are called to have a higher knowledge and preparation.

Useful and important initiatives have been taken for supporting biblical and theological preparation. There is a strong need for an educational project for theological as well as for academic training, essential especially for Christian leaders. Particular attention must be paid to training addressed to churches and worth of note is the fact that in Italy Evangelical academic structures do exist, suitable for theological training. Belonging to different denominations and created at different times they all can offer a very respectable formative programme.

The Waldensian Faculty of Theology, in Rome, is one of those structures. It is the oldest institution in Italy for Academic studies of Evangelical theology. Founded in 1855 at Torre Pellice (TO), it first moved to Florence at Palazzo Salviati (1860-1921) and then to the present site in Rome, via P. Cossa, near the Waldensian church on Cavour square. The Waldensian Faculty is an extraordinary meeting and dialogue place in a context of prestigious academic exchanges with other public or pontifical universities of the city, a city which offers an incomparable artistic and historical scenery for those who are passionate about the evolution of Christianity.⁶⁰

The Adventist Faculty based in Florence. The Adventist Institute was founded in September 1940, in Florence, as a theological school. The president of the Christian Adventist Church’s Italian Missions, pastor Gianluigi Lippolis, in 1929, appealed to the leaders of the organisation for the creation of a pastors’ training school who, until then, went to Collonges Sous-Salève, High Savoy,

⁵⁹ Istat. (2017). La produzione e la lettura di libri in Italia. Available at: <https://www.istat.it/it/archivio/213901> (Accessed on 18/06/2019).

⁶⁰ Facoltà Valdese. (n.d.). Presentazione. Available at: <http://facoltavaldese.org/it> (Accessed on 01/08/2018).

France for their theological studies. Ten years later, on July 10, 1939, in Bern, during the Divisional Executive Committee meeting the opening of a school in Florence, with a 4-year programme, was authorised.

The Pentecostal Faculty of Religious Sciences, based in Bellizzi (SA). The Pentecostal Faculty of Religious Sciences is the first academic institution founded by the Italian Pentecostal Movement. Instituted in 2004 by the Pentecostal Federation it became active in 2006, by the administration of the Charisma Foundation which is the federation legal container of the Institution which has its own recognition.

The multicultural and intercultural of the worldwide Pentecostal phenomenon require a formative offer comprising a confrontation with the growing multi-ethnic contemporary religious scene within which Pentecostal churches and communities act.

The European Nazarene College (EuNC) is a multisite school with a central administration offering a variety of formative residential and on-line programmes. One of the Italian e-learning centres is in Catania. The European Nazarene College (EuNC) is a Ministry professional institution offering a post-secondary level of education for Christian service. Its aim is to help students to prepare themselves for a vocational activity inside the church or in Christian organisations. EuNC is a Nazarene educational school.

Connected to what has just been said, at the educational level there is the urgency of lifting up the level of knowledge. At the same time, some difficulties cannot be ignored since culture and scholastic education have always been strongly influenced by the dominant religion, i.e. the RCC

In Italy, therefore, despite the indications coming from the European Council to include in the school programmes a non-confessional course on religious education, there is a lasting lack of laicity and a Catholic confessionism "overdose". The European Council's solicitations are not taken seriously, being considered unreal and impracticable: in reality, the State submits to the power of the Pact (Genre, 2008:168). In a pluralist society, making room for other models and visions should be physiological, but not in this country which has its own specific history and does not allow any space to others.

Having this all as a background we try to find the best way to do mission. Regarding immigration, in the majority of cases, from a social, economic and political and even emotional point of view, it is valued negatively. If, on the one side, this is true, on the other side we should value it in the light of Israel's history and of what God did for his people. All of this should make us think and ponder the motivations of our service towards others, especially foreigners. According to what has been said, we can confidently affirm that the Church's service towards the marginalised or

foreign refugees or immigrants differs substantially from that of the humanitarian associations (NGOs) since the aim of the Church is to establish relationships and to offer hospitality showing the value of brotherly communion within our communities.

Today's missionary activity in Italy is facing the problem of immigration. Criminal actions and terrorism (with many violent attacks in several European countries), are producing an unprecedented wave of xenophobic reaction. Meanwhile, nothing is done to evangelise these people. Some missionary organisations and local churches are working on implementing programmes for welcoming migrants showing a real solidarity. The following are three already active programmes:

Project 1: "The Church and Urban mission"- AGAPE project in Catania (Sicily-Italy) to the homeless, rescuing women from prostitution and helping refugees to settle in in their new environment.

Project 2: Humanitarian Corridors. An agreement was reached among the Foreign Ministry, the Ministry of Interior, the S. Egidio Community, the Evangelical Church Federation in Italy (ECFI) and the Waldensian Table - envisioning the arrival, in two years, of about a thousand people not only from Lebanon but from Morocco and Ethiopia too.

Project 3: Refuge Centre for immigrants. This project is called "Refuge Centre Project" and it started in Genoa in June 2015 under the direction of the Apostolic Church in Italy.

As has been seen, several factors have hampered the development of the Italian Evangelical Church, mostly due to the religious but also cultural conformation of Italy. The consequences are quite evident and the new generations' task for Christians is to overturn these results. It is not an easy task, but believers must once again try to bear this witness into the social, cultural and political texture of the nation. Firstly, it is important to rediscover and cultivate dialogue between religious denominations, which will produce concerted and targeted actions. In doing so, the effects of Jesus' intimate prayer addressed to the Father in which He presents us all, and of the "great commandment" addressed to the Church of all times, is clearly visible:

John 17:15-21 ... ¹⁵ My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. ¹⁶ They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. ¹⁷ Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. ¹⁹ For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified. ²⁰ My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, ²¹ that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me.

Matthew 28:16-20 ... ¹⁶Then the eleven disciples went to Galilee, to the mountain where Jesus had told them to go. ¹⁷When they saw him, they worshiped him; but some doubted. ¹⁸Then Jesus came to them and said: "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. ¹⁹Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely, I am with you always, to the very end of the age.

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