

Chapter 20

Italy



Italy has been the site of some momentous events in history, not least of which being the rise and fall of the Roman Empire. With the collapse of the western half of that empire in 476, came the rise of the Roman Catholic Church short centuries later. The Church emerged as the only organizational structure left that was, to some degree, able to preserve civilization and Christianity in the West. A corrupted Church lost the allegiance of most of Northern Europe (except Ireland) during the Reformation. Italy remained Catholic and still is, in name only. Like most of Europe, Italy has become highly secular and very hardened to the gospel. Many of the priests in the Catholic Church have turned to the occult, particularly in Turin. Confidence in “Christianity” as most Italians understand it has also declined due to sexual scandals within the church along with the Vatican Bank money laundering practices brought to light beginning in 2014.

Jack Kreidler was born into a German family who had immigrated to New York. He broke away from a pampered boyhood, and after World War II, he was sent all over the world by Pan American Airlines, using his abilities as a technical advisor to set up airports. Along the way, he picked up the ability to forge documents and soon was involved with an international crime syndicate in drug smuggling. Being truly global and using his status with Pan Am, he became a useful tool for his crime bosses. He married an Italian socialite named Ana and settled down into a normal routine with her living in Rome. Ana did not know about Jack’s life as a criminal. As Interpol was closing in on him, he finally confessed to his wife on a trip to New York and was even considering suicide. He then confessed to his mother, whom he had not seen in many years, in a reunion with her. She blurted out as he was leaving, “Why don’t you trust God?” He cynically prayed to God afterward, saying, “OK, if you exist, show yourself!” God did just that. On October 2, 1954, Jack “stumbled” into a Word of Life rally in New York City and trusted Christ as his Savior. With help and counseling, it became apparent that God was calling him back to Italy as a missionary, not as a criminal. He was introduced to Open Air Campaigners by seeing and then participating in the open-air ministry with Jim Duffecy and Art Williams, conducting meetings in Times Square. He eventually joined them as a volunteer and started his ministry based in Rome in 1969. During the



JACK KREIDLER

1970s, Jack worked with various groups in the Rome and Naples areas and was able to conduct major outreaches not only in Rome and Ostia (Rome's port) but in other cities as well. Some churches were planted as a result. Jack was never able to start a full-fledged OAC branch or build a team, as he operated in the manner of an independent evangelist. In the early 1990s, he took on an international itinerant ministry, and the work in Italy became dormant. Jack was promoted to heaven in April 2008.



ANNI & KORKY DAVEY

However, the work of OAC in Italy did not vanish. Korky Davey (OAC UK) took up the torch and was able to lead teams in Italy, training churches in evangelism, and conducting outreach. His ministry led to the formation of some very active evangelists such as Dave Jones, who had a dynamic ministry in the region of Milan and subsequently Rome during the 1980s.

Later, Mark and Kathy Detzler (OAC UK) came to Milan in 1987. They ministered for over ten years before returning to their home base in Britain to be involved in a church-plant in Bristol but still maintained a great concern for the work in Italy.



ROB & TRACI DAVIS

Rob Davis (OAC Europe) also led teams to Italy in the early 2000s. These teams became known as the OAC Europe Now outreach which was based in Venice and ministered in various areas throughout Northern Italy.

Michela Piccolo was trained in the UK and, along with her husband, Giancarlo, returned to Milan in 1998 and established the OAC ministry in that city. There is a weakness in the evangelical churches in Italy in that they are small, divided, and often don't get along with each other. Michela, who is very skilled in mime, clown ministry, object lessons, puppets, and use of the sketchboard, has been well suited to teach churches how to reach out to their communities. That has been made easier since the Catholic Church ceased to be the state religion in 1984, creating an atmosphere with great freedom of religion. However, religious education in schools is strictly limited to the teaching of Catholicism. Michela and Giancarlo, as they train and equip these churches,



MICHELA PICCOLO AND THE MIME TEAM

are helping to create solid confidence and the ability to witness effectively for Christ in their neighborhoods. Several young people who received this training are now leaders in their local churches. Some are even going into full-time ministry, which demonstrates how OAC has proven to be a useful tool in Italian church growth.



Michela's ministry goal is to encourage and equip the church to do effective evangelism in their own area. Through the years, there have been individuals coming to Italy and conducting ministry on their own instead of working in conjunction with the local church. This often gave people within many local churches the impression that outreach needed to be done by the "professionals" which too many times led local Christians to think they weren't good enough to do this ministry. That's why OAC in Italy built up a training program to help the church prepare itself well enough so they could be bold and effective as they preached the Good News on the streets using creative tools such as the sketchboard, mime, clowning, object lessons, and puppets. Through the years, OAC



in Italy has been able to equip several teams who were then able to bring the Good News out to the streets, in prisons, parks, hospitals, homes for the elderly, and so on. One of the specific goals of this training is to encourage teenagers to be involved in evangelism and be active in the local church.

OAC in Italy is now working on a project which aims to produce multimedia evangelistic material for today's generation and thus continue to 'Present Christ by All Means Everywhere.'

