

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, the Roman Catholic Church rose in the following centuries. The church emerged as the only organizational structure left that could, to some degree, 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 much of Europe, Italy has become highly secular and increasingly resistant 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.

The genesis of OAC in Italy began with a man named Jack Kreidler who was born into a German family that had immigrated to New York. He broke away from a pampered boyhood and, after World War II, was sent all over the world by Pan American Airlines, using his expertise as a technical advisor to set up airports. Along the way, he learned to forge documents and soon became involved in an international crime syndicate engaged in drug smuggling. Being truly global and using his status with Pan Am, he became a valuable tool for his crime bosses. He married an Italian socialite named Ana and settled down into a routine with her, living in Rome. Ana did not know about Jack’s secret criminal life. 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 also revealed his secret lifestyle to his mother, whom he had not seen in many



JACK KREIDLER

years, during a reunion with her. So far, this doesn’t seem to be a promising start to a God-honoring ministry in Italy! But, as God often does, He was about to take an imperfect, flawed, sin-filled life and transform it for great use in His kingdom. After Jack’s reunion with his mother was over, she blurted out as he was heading out the door, “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, but this time as

a missionary, not 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 1970s, Jack worked with various groups in the Rome and Naples areas and conducted major outreaches not only in Rome and Ostia (Rome's port) but also in other cities. 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 more like 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, OAC's work in Italy did not vanish. Korky Davey (OAC UK) took up the torch and led 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.

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, while still maintaining a great love for the work in Italy.

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



ROB & TRACI DAVIS

Michela Piccolo was trained in the UK and, along with her husband, Giancarlo, returned to Milan in 1998, where they reestablished the OAC ministry. There is a weakness in Italy's evangelical churches; they are small, divided, and often don't get along with one another. Michela, who is very skilled in mime, clown ministry, object lessons, puppets,



MICHELA PICCOLO AND THE MIME TEAM

and the 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 of great religious freedom. However, religious education in schools is strictly limited to the teaching of Catholicism. Michela and Giancarlo, as they train and equip these churches, 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 entering full-time ministry, demonstrating that OAC has proven to be a valuable tool in Italian church growth.



Michela's ministry goal is to encourage and equip the local church to conduct effective evangelism in their local communities. Over the years, individuals have come to Italy and conducted ministry on their own rather than working in conjunction with the local church. This often gave people the impression that

outreach needed to be done by the "professionals," which, too frequently, led local Christians to think they weren't good enough to be involved in ministry. That's why OAC in Italy established a training program to help the church prepare so they could be bold and effective as they preach the good news on the streets, using creative tools such as the sketchboard, mime, clowning, object lessons, and puppets. Over the years, OAC in Italy has equipped several teams, who then brought the good news to the streets, prisons, parks, hospitals, senior citizens' homes, and beyond. One of the specific goals of this training is to encourage individuals, especially teenagers, to become 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."

