

Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe

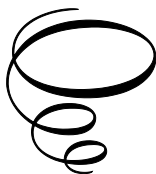
Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe

Past and Present Volume I/2

Edited by

Gerhard Besier and Katarzyna Stokłosa

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Jehovah's Witnesses in Europe: Past and Present Volume I/2

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Branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Emmen;
Dutch issue of "The Watchtower": "De Boomen";
Group of Bible Students gathered in Pinerolo, 1925;
Maria Pizzato;
Virgil and Lizzie Ferguson, Lisbon 1931.

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ITALY

Jehovah's Witnesses – A Century of Suppression, Growth and Recognition

Paolo Piccioli† & Max Wörnhard*

1. The Beginnings

1.1. Introduction

As was the case in other European countries, news of Jehovah's Witnesses first reached Italy¹ through its emigrants. In the United States, Italian immi-

* Paolo Piccioli (1936–2010) returned to his native Tuscany in the summer of 2009 after years at the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rome, where he had worked as a researcher and custodian of their historical archive. He lost his battle with cancer on 6 Sep. 2010, shortly after finishing his last seminal work (cf. note 1) and while preparing this article. We last met just a few days prior to his death. His keen investigative spirit remained with him to the very end. His fruitful and conscientious work in gathering vast archive material now characterises this article. I shall remember my colleague and friend with sincere and heartfelt gratitude. (M. W.) Cf. Life story (LS) of Elisa Piccioli, in: *The Watchtower* (WTE), 134 (12), 15 Jun. 2013, 3–6.

1. In 1931, the Bible Students adopted the name Jehovah's Witnesses. Their main publication, "The Watchtower" (published continuously since July 1879; known as "Zion's Watch Tower and Herald of Christ's Presence" in its early years, and called "La Torre di Guardia" [TdG] in Italian), has experienced slight changes to its title over time. For simplicity, we mainly refer to the current title, sometimes with the definite article and sometimes without – and in the relevant language. (Prior to World War II, the contents of the different language editions were not always identical and even afterwards there were time delays for translation reasons. Full synchronised publication was gradually achieved in the mid-1980s). As far as possible, English-language sources are used. We have generally translated the extensive Italian quotations ourselves. For broader insights into the history of Jehovah's Witnesses, please refer to their own publications: 1975 and 1982 Yearbooks of Jehovah's Witnesses; *Jehovah's Witnesses – Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, 1993; Dossier "I Testimoni

grants encountered the “Bible Students”: a study group formed in the 1870s by Charles Taze Russell in Allegheny (now part of Pittsburgh). These immigrants wrote to relatives and friends about their new-found faith, enclosing literature published by the “Bible Students” in Italian. The new movement also gained recognition in Europe through Russell’s many missionary tours between 1891 and the outbreak of World War I. Russell noted how audiences in different lands reacted to his lectures and he published his observations in “Zion’s Watch Tower.” For example, in the November 1891 edition, he reported regarding his first tour: “But Norway, Sweden, Denmark, Switzerland and especially England, Ireland, and Scotland are fields ready and waiting to be harvested.” And Italy? After visiting Russia (Moldova) and Turkey in August and September of 1891, Russell then travelled to Italy, where he visited Brindisi, Naples, Pompeii, Rome, Florence, Venice and Milan.²

This first trip to Italy yielded little result, for we read in his report: “We saw nothing to encourage us to hope for any harvest in Italy or Turkey or Austria or Germany.”³ Nevertheless, Russell returned to Italy in the spring of 1910. On 1 May 1910, the “Giornale d’Italia” newspaper announced that Russell was to deliver a discourse that same day. This he gave at a sports hall in Rome: his only discourse in Italy on record. What was the result? On 15 June 1910, Russell admitted in “Zion’s Watch Tower”: “In the main, the entire meeting was rather disappointing. The hope for a large number of at-

di Geova in Italia” [Jehovah’s Witnesses in Italy], Rome 1998. See also Associazione Europea dei Testimoni di Geova per la Tutela della Libertà Religiosa [European Association of Jehovah’s Witnesses for the Protection of Religious Freedom] (ed.), Intolleranza Religiosa alle soglie del Duemila [Religious Intolerance at the Threshold of the Year 2000], Rome 1990. Other historically relevant works, particularly regarding Jehovah’s Witnesses under Fascism, include Giorgio Rochat, *Regime fascista e Chiese evangeliche* [The Fascist Regime and Protestant Churches], Turin 1990; Sylvie Graffard/Leo Tristan, *I Bibelforscher e il nazismo (1933–1945)* [The Bible Students and National Socialism (1933–1945)], Paris 1994 (originally published in French in 1990: *Les Bibelforscher et le nazisme [1933–1945]*); Detlef Garbe, *Between Resistance and Martyrdom: Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Third Reich*, Madison, Wisconsin 2008; Guy Canonici, *Les Témoins de Jéhovah face à Hitler* [Jehovah’s Witnesses Facing Hitler], Paris 1998; Paolo Piccioli, *Il prezzo della diversità. Una minoranza a confronto con la storia religiosa in Italia negli scorsi cento anni* [The Price of Diversity. A Minority in Conflict with the Religious History of Italy over the last 100 Years], Naples 2010 (Esch-sur-Alzette 2014) – the work on which this article is based and from which most archive research is drawn. All photographs are published by courtesy of Jehovah’s Witnesses, Italy.

2. JWArchI, report from Maria Pizzato, 13 Jul. 1955; letter from Aldo Fornerone, 18 Oct. 1980.

3. Jehovah’s Witnesses – Proclaimers (note 1), 406; WTE Nov. 1891, 148.

tendees was not fulfilled at all, in spite of a large hall being made available in a central location and widespread notice.”

Russell’s impression had likely been influenced by the omnipresent power and culture of the Catholic Church that he observed in Italy – especially in Rome. However, as history now shows, that first impression was deceiving. Today, of all the Christian churches and denominations in Italy, Jehovah’s Witnesses are the largest Christian community after the Catholic Church. Although the Witnesses make up less than 1 % of Italy’s population, this percentage represents a quarter of a million active adherents or “publishers” – making Italy the country with the largest number of Jehovah’s Witnesses in the whole of Europe, and the fifth largest in the world (after the United States, Brazil, Mexico and Nigeria).

This article will focus on their extraordinary history, which was and remains marked by attempts from influential forces in Italy to obstruct or even suppress non-Catholic minorities. Such suppression has particularly impacted Jehovah’s Witnesses. Many forms of intolerance came from both powerful politicians and the Catholic hierarchy, especially during the Fascist dictatorship. Therefore, this article deals largely with the civil courage and tireless legal efforts of a comparatively small group seeking freedom of belief, and their conflicts with opponents and oppressors. To a lesser extent, it also presents the “inside story” of this community, detailing their amazing growth after World War II, the impact of their leadership, structural developments, and challenges, both past and present.⁴

1.2. Beginnings in Pinerolo

Russell made his third and final visit to Italy in March 1912. According to statements from contemporaries, he journeyed to Pinerolo, near Turin, where the first group of Bible Students in Italy had emerged.⁵

According to records from those early days, during a previous stop-off at Pinerolo in 1891, Russell had already met Daniele Rivoire,⁶ a teacher who had belonged to the Waldensian Church and began translating “Zion’s Watch Tower” into Italian in 1903. He called the magazine “La Vedetta di

4. Other researchers have also begun to examine these aspects. Cf. Massimo Introvigne, *I Testimoni di Geova: già e non ancora* [Jehovah’s Witnesses – Facts about the Past and Questions about the Future], Turin 2002, and his further literary references; Piccioli, *Il prezzo della diversità* (note 1).

5. JWArchI, LS Adele Brun, Sep. 1963, and the report from Maria Pizzato (note 2). Cf. *Jehovah’s Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, 128, which refers to Russell’s visit to Pinerolo in 1912.

6. JWArchI, report from Maria Pizzato (note 2).

Sion e l'Araldo della presenza di Cristo" [The Guardian of Zion and Herald of Christ's Presence]. It was published quarterly in Pinerolo. The magazine was distributed through commercial channels to the main newsagents in key provincial locations.

Once the Italian edition of "The Watchtower" appeared in 1903, Rivoire began translating Russell's first volume of "Studies in the Scriptures," entitled "The Divine Plan of the Ages." The following year, he was so far along that he published the book at his own expense⁷ – even before the official Italian translation of the volume appeared in the United States. In the foreword to readers, Rivoire wrote: "We place this first Italian rendition under the protection of the Lord. May He bless it, in spite of its shortcomings, so that it contributes to the glorification of His most holy name and to the increase of godly fear amongst his Italian-speaking children. May the heart of all those who through the reading of this book come to esteem the depth of the riches, the wisdom and knowledge of the Divine plan and Divine love, be personally thankful to that God by means of whose undeserved kindness it was possible to publish this book."⁸ On 17 June 1904, the newspaper "L'Écho des vallées" listed the book among the new titles received by the editors.

Another Waldensian who appreciated Russell's publications was Pastor Giuseppe Banchetti. When the "Divine Plan of the Ages" appeared in 1905, Banchetti wrote a review at Revoire's request. It expressed deep appreciation and was published in the Protestant magazine "La Rivista Cristiana" [Christian Magazine]. "In our opinion," he wrote of Russell's book, "this is the most visionary and surest guide that every Christian can find in order to take himself deeper into a useful and blessed study of the Holy Scriptures. I had hardly finished the reading when for me what were as scales fell from my eyes and it was as if the way of God showed itself clearer and easier. The inconsistencies, even the ones, which seemed apparent, disappeared for the most part. The teachings, once too hard, seemed to me now to be simple and perfectly acceptable. Things thus far incomprehensible now largely be-

7. In his article "Due pastori valdesi di fronte ai testimoni di Geova" [Two Waldensian Pastors Faced with Jehovah's Witnesses], in: *Bollettino della Società di studi valdesi*, no. 186, Jun. 2000, 76–81, Piccioli still believed that Professor Daniele Rivoire, a Waldensian pastor born in 1825 in Prarostino, translated certain publications of the Bible Students (which is also expressed in *WTE* 15 Apr. 2002, 28–29). However, according to the letter from Daniele Rivoire [sic] printed in *WTE* 1 Feb. 1905, it is more likely that he is the Waldensian teacher who was born long after the aforementioned pastor.

8. *Il Piano delle Età* [The Divine Plan of the Ages], Tipografia Sociale, Pinerolo 1904, Vol. I (JWArch).

came obvious to me. The admirable plan of salvation of the world in Christ unfolded before me with such majestic simplicity that I felt myself impelled to proclaim as did the Apostle: ‘Oh the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God!’ [...] ‘Who is for the LORD?’ I will proclaim like Moses. May you take the Bible in your right hand, the source of all light and all strength – and may you not be ashamed to also take Russell’s human work in your left hand. May you help yourself to it, like Apollos, the modest one who helped himself to the wise instruction offered to him by Aquila and Priscilla. You will be blessed and you shall reap delightful fruits within yourself and be more qualified to offer help and consolation to those to whom He will show his care.”⁹

Early in the twentieth century, Fanny Lugli,¹⁰ a member of the Waldensian Church from San Germano Chisone (not far from Pinerolo), received a copy of the “Divine Plan of the Ages” from relatives in Boston. As early as 1903, she professed her faith in the teachings of the Bible Students. This was apparent from the meetings that were conducted in her home, which were attended by a small group of participants. Fanny Lugli was among the first Italians (if not the very first) to become one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. A report on European conventions in “The Watchtower” of 1 July 1903, mentions that Russell had met 170 brothers at a meeting in Zurich at the end of May 1903 – including “two from Italy.”¹¹ Sadly, it is no longer possible to establish the identity of the two Italian Bible Students who travelled to Zurich. In 1905, Giosuè Vittorio Paschetto acquired a copy of “Divine Plan of the Ages” and “rejoiced exceedingly,” as his son Silvio later wrote, “for described therein was the way of salvation for the whole of humanity.”¹² He began discussing these subjects with others, including pastors and other members



FIG. 1 - 1 Fanny Lugli, most likely the first Bible Student in Italy

9. *La Rivista Cristiana*, 1904, 351–354.

10. Fanny (Stefania) Balmas, widow of Alfonso Lugli, born 1867, died 1937.

11. *WTE* 1 Jul. 1903, 197.

12. *JWArchI*, LS Silvio Paschetto, 1970.

of the Waldensian Church to which he belonged. During this same period, Clara Cerulli Lantaret also joined the group, as did Remigio Cuminetti around 1910.¹³



FIG. 1-2 Remigio Cuminetti, one of the earliest Bible Students and probably the first conscientious objector in Italy

These people played a remarkable role in establishing the work of Jehovah's Witnesses. A report from the Rome Prefecture in 1953 claimed that "the first traces in Italy go back to the year 1909."¹⁴ In fact, the first Italian community of Bible Students had already been founded in Pinerolo in 1908. A publication on the local history of San Germano Chisone, "La memoria e l'immagine" [Recollections and Pictures], referred to an unspecified "report from the year 1907," according to which "only some fifteen persons kept themselves separate from the Waldensian Church": an apparent reference to those Waldensians that had become Bible Students.¹⁵

Religious meetings were held on Thursday evenings in Pinerolo at 7 Piazza Montebello, the home of Clara Cerulli, and on Sunday afternoons in San Germano Chisone, at Fanny Lugli's house in Gondini. When Russell made his last visit in 1912, the meetings of this solitary congregation were being attended by around 40 people.¹⁶ At that time, their activities were supervised by the Swiss branch office of the Watch Tower Society, and this

13. Cuminetti was born in 1890 in Piscina near Pinerolo, and died in 1939.

14. ZStA Rome, GAB, 1953–1956, file 271, report for the head office of the Polizia di Stato [State Police], 16 Mar. 1953.

15. Giorgio Baret/Clara Bounous/Paolo Ribet (eds.), *La memoria e l'immagine: cento anni di vita a S. Germano attraverso la fotografia (1890–1990)* [Recollections and Pictures: 100 Years of Life in San Germano in Pictures (1890–1990)], S. Germano-Pramollo 1990, 15. Some references to the beginnings of the Bible Students in Italy can also be found in: Giuliano Falasca, *Testimoni di Geova [Jehovah's Witnesses]*, in: Giuseppe Cingolani/Ornella Urpis (eds.), *Luci sull'immortalità. Religioni storiche, movimenti, New Age* [Light on Immortality. Historical Religions, Movements, New Age], Milan 2000, 463–469.

16. JWArchI, LS Maria Pizzato, 1971, and LS Adele Brun, 1963 (note 5).

continued until 1945. Clara Cerulli, who had a good command of English and French, acted as the representative for the Swiss branch office in Italy.

Remigio Cuminetti was sentenced to three years and two months in prison by the military tribunal in Alessandria in 1916 for his conscientious objection to military service. As far as we know, Cuminetti's was the first documented case of conscientious objection to military service to be tried before an Italian court.¹⁷ There were numerous attempts to pressure him, to break his will and force him to wear a uniform. The Turin magazine "L'Incontro" [The Encounter] featured an article in its July/August 1952 issue entitled "The Odyssey of a Conscientious Objector during World War I." It reported on the determination, courage and faith shown by Cuminetti – who was even interned in "lunatic asylums for criminals."



FIG. 1-3 Group of Bible Students gathered in Pinerolo, 1925

17. Judgment no. 309 from 18 Aug. 1916, file on Remigio Cuminetti, now in the Archive of the Tribunale Militare di Torino [Military Tribunal in Turin]. The conscientious reasons invoked by Cuminetti were documented as follows: "He declared that peace among mankind is at the foundation of faith in Christ, the worldwide brotherhood, and that as a firm believer, he could not and would not wear a uniform that symbolises war and the killing of brothers (as he calls the enemies of the Fatherland)." The ruling was confirmed by the Supreme War and Naval Court judgment of 7 Dec. 1916, found in the very same archive.

1.3. Modest Organisational Developments

In the 1920s, an office was opened in Pinerolo to facilitate the expansion of their evangelising activity. Humble premises were rented at 11 Via Silvio Pellico¹⁸ and for years this address appears in documents stored in the Italian State Archives.¹⁹ A letter published in “La Torre di Guardia” (Italian edition of “The Watchtower”) of 15 April 1920 shows just how useful this office was in those early days. A Bible Student reported to the editors: “Dear Sister Cerulli writes to me from time to time from Pinerolo and her letters are always very welcome. [...] When finances allow, I visit Sister Cerulli in Pinerolo and the vicinity of San Germano. There, together with other brothers and sisters, we read, study and meditate upon the Holy Word of God.”

In 1922, the year Mussolini came to power, Remigio Cuminetti replaced Clara Cerulli as the representative for the work in Italy. However, another im-

portant task lay ahead, closely linked to the evangelising activity that the new office now supervised: Bible publications (books, brochures, leaflets) from the headquarters in the United States, needed to be translated into Italian. After World War I, this work was initially entrusted to Professor Giuseppe Banchetti who, as already mentioned, was a Waldensian Pastor and appreciated the teachings of the Bible Students. Banchetti never left the Waldensian Church, despite believing many of the teachings of the Bible Students and spreading their message. He also distributed publications from the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania (the American publishing house of Jehovah’s Witnesses) in the various territories where he served



FIG. 1-4 The building in Pinerolo where the Bible Students opened their first Italian office

18. This address for the official office of the “Torre di Guardia, Società Bibbie e Trattati” seems to be first mentioned in TdG, 1 Aug. 1924.

19. ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Turin Prefecture, 22 Aug. 1929; ZStA Rome, F4, file 91, Ascoli Piceno Prefecture, 20 May 1929; ZStA Rome, F4, file 656, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 6 Feb. 1932; ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, circular from the Ministry of the Interior, 13 Mar. 1940, 3.

as a pastor. Thus, the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses reached other parts of Italy, such as Chieti and Cerignola. A few inhabitants of Cerignola even formed their own Bible study group after having read those publications. When Banchetti died in 1926, Giosuè Vittorio Paschetto carried on the translation work until he was arrested by the Fascist police in 1939.

2. Under the Dictatorship

2.1. Regime Gradually Targets Bible Students

After World War I, many emigrants who had been exposed to different beliefs in the United States, Canada, Australia, France and Belgium, returned to Italy and shared their new-found faith with relatives and acquaintances. Thanks to these returning emigrants, small groups of Bible Students (or Jehovah's Witnesses) began to emerge between 1919 and 1935 in the provinces of Sondrio (Valtellina), Trento, Vincenza, Lucca, L'Aquila, Teramo, Pescara, Benevento, Avellino and in the Sicilian towns of Messina, Palermo and Agrigento. During the same period, other groups appeared in the provinces of Aosta, Ravenna, Foggia and to the south in Matera (Basilicata).

However, their growth remained insignificant due to obstacles and resistance from the Fascist regime. By the outbreak of World War II, there were only 150 of Jehovah's Witnesses in the whole country. Nevertheless, they generated notable and extensive documentation in the State Archives. The sheer quantity of documents is doubtless due to the Witnesses' zeal for proselytising and their correspondence abroad. The post was monitored; letters streamed in from abroad – from the headquarters in Brooklyn, as well as from numerous Italians who had become Bible Students while overseas. Religious publications were often enclosed as gifts. All such correspondence was seized; names and addresses were scrupulously recorded in official logs. Any material that fell into the hands of the regime would spark a police investigation.

1922 saw the regime come to power and by 1924, the first document about a police investigation into the Bible Students appears in the "Archivio Centrale dello Stato" (Central State Archive – ZStA Rome). It concerned a notice from the Naples Prefecture dated 22 March 1924 that was directed to the Ministry of the Interior; enclosed was the tract "A Challenge to World Leaders" (printed and published in Italian in the United States by the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania). The tract was

seized by the post office at Naples harbour.²⁰ In September 1925, the Prefect of Venice reported another tract to the Ministry of the Interior, entitled “Ecclesiastics Indicted.” It was seen as an insult to the “Pontifex Maximus” and the “present government.”²¹ Interestingly, “The Watchtower” notes that Remigio Cuminetti had submitted that very tract to government agencies for inspection, and obtained their permission for printing and distribution. However, no proof of this authorisation has thus far been uncovered in the archives. “The Watchtower” reported on the efforts undertaken to distribute the tract, mentioning that the “Italian brothers distributed 100,000 copies of the ‘Indictment’ and that they made sure that the Pope and high officials in the Vatican each received their own personal copy.”²² Were church hierarchy complaints about “increased evangelical propaganda” referring to this unusual tract distribution by the Bible Students?

A communication from the Turin Prefecture to the Ministry of the Interior’s Department of “Public Security” dated 12 October 1927, bears a handwritten comment revealing that in April 1927, permission was sought to distribute another tract containing a resolution (“A Testimony to the Rulers of the World”) but that this tract was confiscated for expressing opinions “contrary to the national order.”²³ It may therefore be assumed that the telegram of 8 October 1927 from Police Chief Arturo Bocchini to the Prefect of Turin, which complains of a “marked increase in evangelical activities in recent times,” pertained to the Bible Students.²⁴ Another handwritten note on a copy of this same tract, which was sent by express delivery on 5 December 1929 to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, informs us that 90,000 copies were seized and “their circulation was prevented.”²⁵

Inspecting, confiscating and enforcing an import ban on all publications from the Bible Students (Jehovah’s Witnesses) posed a considerable challenge to the regime. It is well known that the public evangelising activity of Jehovah’s Witnesses involves the wide distribution of tracts, brochures, books and Bibles. At the end of May 1928, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs relayed information to the Ministry of the Interior that it had received from the Italian Embassy in Washington. This information indicated that although

20. ZStA Rome, F4, file 74.

21. ZStA Rome, F1, file 42, entry from 17 Sep. 1925.

22. WTE 1 Dec. 1924 and 1 Dec. 1925. The magazine rarely featured news on the small group of Italian Bible Students. This report mentions or uses all such references, insofar as they are of historical relevance.

23. ZStA Rome, G1, file 5.

24. ZStA Rome, G1, file 193.

25. ZStA Rome, G1, file 5.

the Bible Students were not always regarded favourably in Protestant circles in the United States, they did not aim to subvert the political and social order.²⁶ Nevertheless, a few months later, the embassy recommended a ban on the importation of Watch Tower publications such as “The Watchtower,” “La Torre di Guardia” and similar publications into the Kingdom of Italy.²⁷ On 20 November, the Ministry of the Interior entered “La Torre di Guardia” as number 32 on the “Directory of forbidden publications.”²⁸ This was seemingly in response to a handwritten comment on a communication from the Bologna Prefecture dated 13 November 1928, which encouraged a ban on the magazine’s distribution. A short time after this action, the same Bologna Prefecture reported the names of 53 persons who had received copies of “La Torre di Guardia.” The names were forwarded to the prefectures where each of the listed persons lived and all were investigated.²⁹ These investigations showed that the majority were not Bible Students, but simply persons whose family members or acquaintances had sent them the magazine.

From this point on, confiscations of publications of Jehovah’s Witnesses steadily increased, as did measures and directives to halt their importation into the country. On 21 September 1929, the Ministry of the Interior sent out a circular along with the names of 59 “Watchtower” subscribers, in order to gain their personal information.³⁰

The responses from prefectures showed that small groups of Bible Students had surfaced in different parts of the country. On 30 July 1931, the High Commissioner for the City and Province of Naples reported: “The commission for the control and surveillance of foreign publications has noticed an intensified campaign using printed matter of a subversive protestant nature; the printed materials are *mainly from the Association of the Bible Students* with its headquarters in Brooklyn and are written by Judge F. [sic] Rutherford.” (Italics added.)³¹ Mechanisms were gradually put in place to ban publications “hostile to the regime.” The Ministry for Press and Propaganda (formerly a State Undersecretariat),³² which was later renamed

26. Cf. *ibid.*

27. Cf. ZStA Rome, F4, file 91, telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, no. 5543/1635 from 9 Oct. 1928.

28. Cf. ZStA Rome, F4, file 91.

29. Cf. *loc. cit.*, notification from 1 Dec. 1928 to the Ministry of the Interior.

30. ZStA Rome, G1, file 25.

31. ZStA Rome, F4, file 105; cf. notes 43 and 155.

32. ZStA Rome, F4, file 21, 11 and 27 Oct. 1934; ZStA Rome, F4, file 78, 10 Dec. 1934; ZStA Rome, F4, file 105, 5 Sep. 1939.



Roma, addì 21 settembre 1929 Anno VII

Ministero dell'Interno

DIREZIONE GENERALE DELLA P. S.
Div. Affari Gen. e Riservati
Sezione II-

---c---

Prot. N° 442/41732

Oggetto

Alle LL. SS. I PREFETTI DI:
GENOVA- MESSINA- TERAMO- POTENZA-
SONDRIO- AQUILA- BENEVENTO- SIRACUSA-
MATERA- VICENZA- ASCOLI - AVELLINO-
FOGGIA- PALERMO- FIRENZE- RAVENNA-BARI-
ALTO COMMISSARIO NAPOLI

Esiste con sede a Brocklyn una "Associazione internaziona-
le studenti biblici" la quale ha carattere protestante, ma è sfa-
vorevolmente conosciuta anche negli stessi ambienti protestanti
che la giudicano una speculazione e pubblicamente la sconfessano.

Detta associazione ha propaggini in Italia ed ha per giornale
Ufficiale la "Torre di Guardia", giornale di cui è vietata la in-
troduzione nel Regno.

Per opportuna notizia si trasmette all'E. V. copia dell'elenco
di coloro i quali erano abbonati al periodico "Torre di Guardia",
e si prega di fornire informazioni sul loro conto e sull'attivi-
tà dell'Associazione in cotesta provincia, comunicando anche qual-
siasi altra notizia.

PEL MINISTRO

Il presente documento è stato depositato nella Biblioteca del Ministero dell'Interno il 21/9/29.

Fig. 1-5 Circular from the Fascist Ministry of the Interior dated 21 September 1929

the Ministry of Popular Culture,³³ had to report any publications under an import or distribution ban to the Ministry of the Interior. The Ministry of the Interior informed all prefects in the country about the bans enacted.³⁴ Many books and brochures by Joseph F. Rutherford (the then president of the Watch Tower Society and the Bible Students Association) featured on the “List of Works Whose Publication, Distribution or Reproduction in the Kingdom Are Banned by the Ministry of Popular Culture.”³⁵ Rutherford’s name was also on the “List of Authors Whose Works Are Unwelcome in Italy.”³⁶

2.2. Convention in Pinerolo

From 23 to 26 April 1925, the first Bible Student convention in Italy took place in Pinerolo. It would be the only convention during the Fascist period. Among those present was Alexander H. Macmillan from the headquarters in Brooklyn. How was such a meeting possible at a time when basic rights were already being suppressed? It was unthinkable to expect the authorities to grant permission for this event. The convention, which took place in a hall in the Corona Grossa Hotel, was organised to coincide with the wedding of Remigio Cuminetti to Albina Protti, one of the colporteur sisters who had come from Switzerland. So the wedding and the convention were a shared event. “La Torre di Guardia” of 1 August 1925 reported that 60 persons were present at this historic convention and that 13 were baptised; five men and eight women.

33. ZStA Rome, F4, file 20, 20 May 1938; ZStA Rome, F4, file 105, 3 Oct. 1938, ZStA Rome, F4, file 20, 9 Oct. 1939, ASMAE, USA 1940, file 69, 31 Aug. and 13 Sep. 1939. In a “note to Il Duce” on 22 Aug. 1938, the “Ministro della Cultura Popolare” (Minister of Popular Culture) proposed a number of directives to monitor the import of foreign books and recommended that post office checks be tightened: ASMAE, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, file 292. Archive F4 deals with the “subversive foreign press” and contains numerous documents on prohibiting the import of printed materials from Jehovah’s Witnesses.

34. ZStA Rome, F4, file 21, 11 and 27 Oct. 1934; ZStA Rome, F4, file 78, 10 Dec. 1934; ZStA Rome, F4, file 105, 5 Sep. 1939.

35. ASMAE, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, file 201.

36. ASMAE, Ministero della Cultura Popolare, 11 Apr. 1942, file 294. Regarding the inclusion of Rutherford on this list, please refer to Giorgio Fabre, *L’elenco. Censura fascista, editoria e autori ebrei* [The List. Fascist Censorship, Jewish Publishers and Authors], Turin 1998, 3, 360–361.

2.3. Investigations Abroad

By 1928 at the latest, the Fascist authorities were also busy abroad in their hunt for information about the Bible Students (known since 1931 as Jehovah's Witnesses), using their diplomatic network to that end.³⁷ As part of these investigations, emissaries from the Fascist police visited both the headquarters in Brooklyn and the office in Bern (Switzerland). They compiled a report of the community's activities and sent it to Rome.³⁸ The report from the Italian Embassy in Bern regarding the visit to the Bible Students' Swiss office in 1930 does contain certain positive details, but is nonetheless written in a critical and bureaucratic tone. For instance, it stated: "The technical and administrative staff – the Swiss 'family' – consists of 35 members of the 'Bible Students Association,' who are modestly compensated and apparently inspired by a certain sacrificial spirit because [...] the operation is a kind of a community which, for the most part, lives from its own resources. [...] The basic principle of the association is not financial gain. Rather, the shortfall is covered through voluntary contributions."³⁹

While investigating recipients of banned publications in Italy, the Fascist authorities sent telegrams to various diplomatic representatives in other countries, in order to learn more about those sending these publications from abroad. Moreover, several foreign representatives provided the Italian authorities with news of publications, conventions and diverse activities of the Bible Students in their respective countries. There are numerous archive documents that contain such information from many Italian diplomatic missions.⁴⁰ In addition, many reports have been found about seamen and passen-

37. The first document uncovered is dated 30 May 1928. Enclosed is a copy of a telegram from the Italian Embassy in Bern to the Ministry of the Interior on 21 May 1928 (ZStA Rome, G1, file 5).

38. Regarding the visits to Brooklyn, cf. ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, handwritten note on the leaflet "Un Appello alle Potenze del Mondo" [Testimony to the Rulers of the World], attached to the telegram from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of 5 Dec. 1929 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 Nov. 1931). In 1920, the Swiss office (initially in Zurich and then in Bern from 1926) functioned as the Central European Office and supervised the work in several countries, including Italy. In 1946, the activities of Jehovah's Witnesses in Italy began being overseen from an office in Italy.

39. ZStA Rome, F4, file 35, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1 Apr. 1930.

40. *Addis Ababa*: ZStA Rome, DAGR, category A1, 1937, file 19, Ministry of the Interior, 20 Aug. 1937. *Bern*: ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Ministry of the Interior, 30 May 1928; ZStA Rome, F4, file 91, Ministry of the Interior, 20 Apr. 1938; ZStA Rome, G1, file 314, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 11 Dec. 1940. *Boston*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 26, Benevento Prefecture, 24 Aug. 1939, Italian Consulate General Boston,

gers who travelled on Italian vessels and owned or distributed publications of the Bible Students,⁴¹ as well as reports about various preachers abroad.⁴² Naturally, all postal correspondence (domestic and international) was continually monitored and the names of both the senders and recipients noted down. Numerous publications and correspondence were confiscated; each time prompting an investigation on the person concerned.⁴³ Not even air-

10 Nov. 1939 and 17 Jan. 1940. *Buenos Aires*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 91, Chieti Prefecture, 6 May 1929, and Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 Nov. 1929. *Helsinki*: ASMAE, FINLANDIA 1931–1933, file 1, Italian Embassy in Finland, 23 May 1933. *Innsbruck*: ZStA Rome, G1, file 313, Bolzano-Bozen Prefecture, 22 Apr. 1942. *Locarno*: ASMAE, SVIZZERA 1941–1943, file 27, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 Sep. 1941. *Lucerne*: ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Consulate General of His Majesty the King of Italy, Zurich, 7 Nov. 1936. *Lugano*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 65, Divisione Polizia Politica (Political Police Division), 19 Feb. 1931; ZStA Rome, F4, file 35, Ministry of the Interior, 22 Jun. 1937; ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 Oct. 1941. *New York*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 91, Italian Consulate General, New York, 28 Jun. 1929; ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 23 Nov. 1931; ZStA Rome, F4, file 100, Italian Consulate General, New York, 27 Jul. 1936. *Ottawa*: ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Italian Consulate General, New York, 26 Oct. 1929. *Paris*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 2, Sottosegretariato di Stato per la Stampa e la Propaganda (State Undersecretariat for Press and Propaganda), 11 Jan. 1935. *Resistencia*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 91, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 18 Nov. 1929. *Seattle*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 20, Ministry of the Interior, copy of telegram no. 3548/763 dated 20 Apr. 1939 from the Italian Embassy in Washington D.C. *Sydney*: ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 7 Mar. 1932. *Washington D.C.*: ZStA Rome, F4, file 35, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 Oct. 1930. *Zurich*: ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 4 Dec. 1936, and Divisione Polizia Politica, 4 and 9 Feb. 1942.

41. ASMAE, USA 1930, file 1610, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 21 Oct. 1930; ZStA Rome, F4, file 23, Ministry of the Interior, copy of the letter from the Commissariat of the Trieste Seaport, 6 Mar. 1931; ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 28 Feb. 1932.

42. ZStA Rome, F4, file 91, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 29 Jul. 1929; ZStA Rome, G1, file 190, Ministero dell’Africa Italiana [Ministry for Italian Africa], 15 Feb. 1938. One of these preachers, Paolina Tognetti, lived in Ponte Tresa, Ticino, near the border to Italy. “Nearly half a quintal” (equivalent to 100 lb or 45 kg) of religious literature was confiscated from her home (ZStA Rome, F4, files 35 and 91, Ministry of the Interior, Direzione Generale della Pubblica Sicurezza [General Agency for Public Security], 22 Jun. 1937, 17 Jul. 1937, 14 Sep. 1937 and 15 Jun. 1938; ZStA Rome, G1, file 318, Italian Embassy in Bern, 8 Apr. 1938).

43. Cf. note 31 (together with the main text) and note 155 (ZStA Rome, F4, file 105) regarding the notification from the High Commissioner for the City and Province of Naples. The correspondence between Remigio Cuminetti and the Watch Tower Society headquarters in Brooklyn was tightly monitored in the early years (ZStA

mail that was merely being transferred at Rome airport escaped inspection. In 1941, letters sent to Rutherford from Switzerland were seized despite being mailed in envelopes addressed to other individuals as a precautionary measure. These letters were never delivered and can be found in the Italian Central State Archive to this day. One of these letters contained reports about the situation of Jehovah's Witnesses in France and Holland.⁴⁴

2.4. Other Small Groups in Northern Italy

As previously mentioned, the first group of Bible Students was formed in Pinerolo, where Remigio and Albina Cuminetti were active and had attracted the attention of the authorities. Yet the community continued to draw members, who in turn were persecuted by the regime.⁴⁵ As the years passed, more groups of Bible Students emerged, usually due to emigrants returning from abroad. Traces of these groups are also found in the archives, for example, in the Aosta Valley⁴⁶ and Veltlin.⁴⁷

Rome, G1, file 5, Ascoli Piceno Prefecture, 24 Sep. 1929; Foggia Prefecture, 18 Nov. 1929, etc.).

44. ZStA Rome, G1, file 5, Ministry of the Interior, 12 Sep. and 31 Dec. 1941; Divisione Polizia Politica, 4 Feb. 1942.

45. Among them was Giosuè Vittorio Paschetto, who began translating the publications after the death of Waldensian Pastor Giuseppe Banchetti. Paschetto was convicted by the Special Tribunal (ZStA Rome, TS, interrogation protocol, 8 Feb. 1940; ZStA Rome, CPC, file 3750, report from OVRA Zone IV, Avezzano, 1 Aug. 1940). Aldo Fornerone was, however, exiled (ZStA Rome, G1, file 426, Turin Questura, 9 Feb. 1940). Domestic exile, known as “confine,” was a police measure introduced under Fascism: those convicted were assigned to forced residence at a secluded location, where they worked on farms under miserable conditions. Cf. Rochat, *Regime fascista* (note 1), 99–100. Regarding the rotten conditions in exile, see also Nello Ajello, *Il confino*, in: *La Repubblica*, 13 Sep. 2003, 39. OVRA was a branch of the Fascist secret police. According to certain sources, the abbreviation stands for “Organizzazione per la Vigilanza e Repressione dell’Antifascismo” [Organisation for the Surveillance and Repression of Anti-Fascism]. See also Mimmo Franzinelli, *I tentacoli dell’OVRA* [The Tentacles of OVRA], Turin 1999.

46. ZStA Rome, G1, file 314, report from Andriani, 3 Jan. 1940, 253–254. Natale Bionaz from Doues (Aosta Valley) made contact with the Pinerolo office after reading Russell’s volume “The Divine Plan of the Ages.” In time, his daughters Girolina and Dina Bionaz adopted the new faith and were baptised in 1932. They were cautioned by the regime. Battista Dialley from Montjovet joined them.

47. Marcello Martinelli first met the Bible Students in the USA and returned to Castione Andevenno (Sondrio, Valtellina) in 1919. Cf. ZStA Rome, G1, file 314, report from Andriani, 3 Jan. 1940, 147–148, 205. Other members of this group: Celeste Balestra; Giovanni Bucellari; Celeste, Domenico and Emilio Negri; Domenico

The archives contain accounts of some very notable events. Sometime before February 1926, two German “colporteurs” (Bible Students who were full time evangelisers – comparable today with the “pioneers” among Jehovah’s Witnesses) went to South Tyrol, which had come under Italian administration after World War I and is now officially known as “Trentino-Alto Adige.”⁴⁸ These two evangelisers encountered little opposition and, within a short time, had managed to reach almost the entire German-speaking territory with their message. However, when they began the same activity in Italian, the local clergy quickly put up resolute resistance. They were arrested in February 1926 in Caldaro by two carabinieri (military police) that were accompanied by two priests. After a few days in prison, the local prefect fined them for disseminating books in the municipality of Caldaro without authorisation from the Authority for Public Security. After paying the fine, they were immediately ordered to leave Italy.⁴⁹

In the 1930s, Giacomo Stampfer started preaching publicly in Trentino-Alto Adige. He had likely discovered his new faith in Austria and soon began serving as a “colporteur” or “pioneer.” In 1935, Giacomo was murdered in an apparent case of unfounded jealousy. The “1936 Year Book of Jehovah’s Witnesses” reported: “One pioneer was shot dead. The Catholic Hierarchy even manifested its venom toward the Lord’s people in interfering with the decent burial of this pioneer, who was witnessing for the Kingdom. [...] The clergy prevented the corpse of this brother from being taken to the funeral rooms, the body being left in an old shed without proper attention. People upon hearing of this outrageous treatment, were incensed, and this furnished an opportunity to give them a witness to the truth.”⁵⁰

Dante Rioggi; Taddeo Valena (ZStA Rome, CPC, file 707, Sondrio Questura, 30 Sep. 1939, and Sondrio Prefecture, 24 Nov. 1939; ZStA Rome, CPC, file 4338, Sondrio Prefecture, 18 Mar. 1940; ZStA Rome, CP, file 1040, Sondrio Prefecture, 20 Jun. 1941; ZStA Rome, G1, file 313, report from OVRA Zone I, Milan, 12 Dec. 1939).

48. The two colporteurs were Oskar Böttcher and Kurt Neidhart; cf. their report to Brooklyn (copy in JWArchI). A report from Remigio Cuminetti in TdG, 1 Nov. 1925 mentioned two nameless German colporteurs who were active “in Tyrol in their own language.”

49. JWArchI, judgment no. 6 from 5 Feb. 1926 by the Caldaro Prefecture.

50. YB 1936 (Bern edition), 121. This paragraph was quoted in a notification from the Ministry for Press and Propaganda to the Ministry of the Interior dated 28 Sep. 1936 (ZStA Rome, F4, file 100). The report from Milan OVRA dated 12 Dec. 1939 (cf. note 47) seems to reveal that Stampfer spoke about his faith with his landlady, Francesca Fallmerayer. When the police questioned her at the end of 1939, she supposedly stated that she “allowed herself to be misled entirely out of curiosity.” The report names Giacomo Stampfer and his home address in San Paolo di Appiano, thus

Severino Oberosler, a native of Roncegno (Trento), was residing in Marlungo near Merano in 1935. The Bern office invited him to become a “colporteur” in a letter penned in German and dated 26 November 1935. But the police intercepted the letter and had it translated. The Bern office was trying to inform Oberosler that working in Italy as a colporteur “would be absolutely impossible under the given circumstances,” but that he “could most probably ‘take up’ such service in France.”⁵¹ No more is known of his fate.

Luigi (Alois) Hochrainer from Campo di Trèns (Bolzano) became acquainted with his new beliefs in 1936 in Austria, where Jehovah’s Witnesses were already suffering severe persecution. There, Luigi had already spent 10 months in prison for being a Bible Student (after the Anschluss with Nazi Germany). Once released, he returned to Italy where the Fascist police kept him under constant surveillance.⁵² More details about Luigi and his fiancée feature later in this report.⁵³

More of Jehovah’s Witnesses were active in the province of Trento. For example, a small group was formed in the Zortea locality of Canal San Bovo (Trento), triggering immediate complaints from the local clergy to the Fascist authorities.⁵⁴ In order to evade persecution, these Witnesses met in hay barns and even cattle sheds. Contemporary documents show that they were strictly monitored by the police. In his report to the Directorate-General for Public Security, the Prefect of Trento contemptuously said: “They do not even have a place of their own to meet, but they use all their homes, stables and sometimes even open fields for their secret meetings [...]. Careful examination of their post has enabled us to prevent members of the aforementioned sect [...] from receiving further printed propaganda [...]. Nevertheless, the sect continues with their activities and manages to obtain and exchange book-

allowing the otherwise meagre details on Stampfer to be pieced together. As it happens, Francesca Fallmerayer later became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses.

51. ZStA Rome, DAGR, category A5, 1935, file 1/Q, Bolzano Prefecture, 2 Dec. 1935. The Milan OVRA also mentions Oberosler in its reports from 12 and 21 Dec. 1939 (ZStA Rome, G1, file 313).

52. ZStA Rome, G1, file 313, Bolzano Prefecture, 22 Apr. 1942.

53. Cf. section 2.15.

54. In 1933, Narciso Stefanon left Belgium and returned to Zortea (ZStA Rome, G1, file 314, report from Andriani, 3 Jan. 1940, 42). Albino Battisti first learnt of Jehovah’s Witnesses in France. After his return to Italy in 1935, he settled down in Calliano, close to Trento (ZStA Rome, G1, file 197, Trento Prefecture, 30 Sep. 1936; ZStA Rome, CP, file 76, Territorial Legion of the Royal Carabinieri Bolzano, Rovereto Company, 10 Sep. 1936; Potenza Prefecture, 16 Jun. 1938; Trento Prefecture, 29 Nov. 1938; StA Matera, Littoria Questura, 1 Dec. 1939).

lets and pamphlets.”⁵⁵ Out of caution, the group also met during the night.⁵⁶ Among the first to join this group was Francesco Zortea (his surname and the village name were the same).⁵⁷ He set out on foot in April 1934 for Fonzaso (Belluno), in order to spread his beliefs. He was stopped by the police and brought back to their barracks; several publications were seized and he was held until the following morning.⁵⁸ When Italy declared war on Ethiopia in October 1935, Zortea was called up for military service in East Africa. He decided, however, to remain neutral and refused to join the army. As a result, in 1936, he was sentenced to five years domestic exile (“confino”) in Muro Lucano (Potenza, Basilicata) for continuing to evangelise despite all orders from the Fascist authorities to desist.⁵⁹ Thanks to a government amnesty, he was set free in 1937. Yet when he returned home, he was forced to suffer another episode of intolerance from the clergy. A local Witness, Angela Simoni, had died and the priest would not permit her to be buried in the parish cemetery, claiming that this would profane holy ground. Three days later, her body was still not buried. Finally, the parish priests from Zortea and Prade met together with the mayor and the municipal secretary and decided that the body must be buried in Prade. The event is recorded in a number of documents. The Trento Questura (police headquarters) emphasised that the corpse must not be brought to the local cemetery, in order to avoid exacerbating the strong feelings of the people, who threatened to resist any supposed desecration of the holy site. Finally, the burial took place at an isolated spot near Prade cemetery, virtually in secret, on the grounds that “this plot has not yet been consecrated.”⁶⁰ Difficulties caused by the clergy were compounded by the tough reaction from the Fascist authorities. The four men who had carried the coffin were all sentenced to domestic exile. Even Domenica Marina Romagna, who had only just started showing interest in the Bible, was exiled simply because “she arranged for a notice to announce the death,

55. ZStA Rome, G1, file 197, 30 Sep. 1936.

56. ZStA Rome, CP, file 1099, Territorial Legion of the Royal Carabinieri Bolzano, Rovereto Company, 2 Sep. 1936.

57. Zortea’s missionary zeal was documented over the years (ZStA Rome, CP, file 1099, Trento Prefecture, 1 Mar. 1939).

58. The district judge (pretore) of Feltre criminally charged Zortea in a judgment dated 4 May 1935 (JWArchI) to pay a fine “for distributing pamphlets with religious content in the public domain without prior permission from the authorities for public security.”

59. ZStA Rome, CP, file 76, Trento Questura, 10 Oct. 1936.

60. StA Trento, Trento Questura, 6 Nov. 1937.

funeral service and burial.”⁶¹ Corpses of Jehovah’s Witnesses continued to be “ghettoised” throughout that region until the 1950s.⁶²

Aldo Fornerone from Pinerolo, described Francesco Zortea as “a decisive, courageous and firm man, a true example of faith.” His sense of attachment to fellow believers was so strong, he cycled to Pinerolo to visit them on several occasions, a roundtrip of 1,000 kilometres (620 miles).⁶³

The new faith had already arrived in Malo (Vicenza) shortly after World War I, through an emigrant who returned from the United States.⁶⁴ The message reached Marradi (Florence) through Switzerland⁶⁵ and spread to Faenza

61. ZStA Rome, CP, file 876, Territorial Legion of the Royal Carabinieri Bolzano, Borgo Valsugana Section, 17 Sep. 1937, and Trento Prefecture, 5 Feb. 1938; ZStA Rome, G1, file 197, Trento Prefecture, 16 Aug. 1937. Caterina Romagna, the sister of Domenica Marina, became one of Jehovah’s Witnesses and was punished with domestic exile, because she, together with others, “demonstrably did not give up in propagating her ideas” (ZStA Rome, CP, file 876, Trento Questura, 6 Nov. 1937).

62. In a letter dated 19 Jun. 1950 and addressed to Francesco Zortea, the local government in Canal San Bovo indicated that the following decision was reached during its meeting on 16 May 1950: “Jehovah’s Witnesses shall, at their own expense and as others do, establish their own cemetery with a separate entrance, next to the Catholic cemetery, or they shall bury their dead in the Prade cemetery which is municipal property and has a corner that has still not been consecrated. This second solution will evoke the resentment and resistance of a part of the population of Prade, but it still meets the legal requirements.” In a notice on 25 Jul. 1950, the government commissioner for the region of Trentino-Alto Adige authorised the municipality of Canal San Bovo “to establish special separate areas in Prade’s municipal cemetery in order to bury the corpses of individuals professing the Jehovah cult.” Documents are in JWArchI.

63. JWArchI, LS Aldo Fornerone, Sep. 1979.

64. This was Giuseppe Bortolotto (ZStA Rome, G1, file 314, report from Andriani, 3 Jan. 1940, 45, 205). One of the first who listened to Bortolotto was Girolamo Sbalchiero. He was arrested in Vicenza for distributing a religious brochure in 1932 (ZStA Rome, TS, interrogation protocol, 21 Feb. 1940). Sbalchiero later recalled this incident taking place in 1929, however, the brochure was first printed in 1932; the judicial comments in Vicenza confirm this year, explicitly referring to 17 Dec. 1932. Among the first to join Sbalchiero were his son Giuseppe, Carlo Quintin and Luigi Zattere (ZStA Rome, G1, file 313, report from OVRA Zone I, Milan, 12 Dec. 1939). With regard to Sbalchiero, the report from Pasquale Andriani, inspector general of OVRA Zone IV, Avezzano, explains: “Even during his arrest he [Sbalchiero] tried to demonstrate the advantages of [Bible] principles to the responsible agents and, once he was incarcerated, to the prison guards” (ZStA Rome, G1, file 314, report from Andriani, 3 Jan. 1940, 42).

65. Between 1921 and 1924, several members of the Protti family returned to Marradi and some of their relatives embraced the new faith. Among these was wid-