

iSeminatore



«The seed is the Word of God»
(Luke 8:11)



Welcome

Welcome to this special issue of *Il Seminatore* ("The Sower"), the magazine edited by the Department of Evangelisation of Evangelical Christian Baptist Union of Italy (U.C.E.B.I.).

We thought that, on such a special occasion as this meeting in Birmingham, where about 13.000 Baptists from all over the world meet together to participate at the 19th Congress of the Baptist World Alliance, our magazine could be an open window on the small world of the Baptist Churches in Italy.

Today the Evangelical Christian Baptist Union of Italy (UCEBI) numbers 120 Churches spread throughout Italy and 5.000 active members with a total population of about 10.000 people.

There are two Departments: the *Department of Theology* and the *Department of Evangelisation*.

The Department of Theology (whose coordinator is pastor Massimo Aprile) supervises the theological and biblical education of the pastors who work at national and local level, often holding refresher courses for them. In addition to which the Department of Theology provides Churches with texts and documents useful for the spiritual growth of their members.

The Department of Evangelisation (whose coordinator is pastor Carmine Bianchi) promotes and coordinates the Churches work of evangelisation, publishes evangelistic materials, maintains relationships with ethnic Churches which are members of UCEBI, and promotes musical education and liturgical workshops.

It is obvious that in 16 pages we cannot cover everything about UCEBI, but through the brief articles which you can read in this magazine we will try to tell you the roots of our history. Moreover, we will try to illustrate to you: the challenges which we are bound to face as witnesses of the Gospel in our Country; the relationships which we hold with several national and international organisations; our commitment for peace and justice and the joy we experience through God's love for each of us.

We Italian Baptists are a small reality, but we rejoice in the thought of being part of a larger family of brothers and sisters from all over the world who pray for each other, who encourage and care for each other and who, despite our cultural and linguistic differences, give testimony through the unity of the Holy Spirit that Jesus Christ is the spring of living water welling up to eternal life.

Marta D'Auria

On this issue:

- ❖ History pag. 3
- ❖ Challenge pag. 4
- ❖ Human rights pag. 5
- ❖ Ethnic congregations pag. 6
- ❖ Music pag. 8
- ❖ Youth pag. 9
- ❖ World-wide Ties pag. 10
- ❖ Ecumenism pag. 11
- ❖ Peace-making pag. 12
- ❖ Confession of faith pag. 14

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Marta D'Auria

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The Beginnings of the Baptist Mission in Italy

Three important strands

Our history in Italy started immediately after the country was unified in 1861. Before that date it was impossible to profess any other faith in most of the country but the Catholic faith. In the Reformation many groups from the reformed tradition spread throughout the Peninsula but the Counter-Reformation destroyed them all. Through six centuries, however, a small faithful minority Christian Church, the Waldensians, survived persecution living on high mountains in the North Western part of Italy. It was only in 1848 that Jews and Waldensians obtained civil rights in the Savoia kingdom, the same rule that was extended to the whole of Italy in 1861.

In 1863 the first Baptist missionaries, Edward Clarke and James Wall, came from England, supported by a group of friends. In 1870 missionaries from the American Southern Baptist Convention arrived while the Northern Baptists who had arrived in 1868 left shortly after. In 1870 one of the British missionaries, James Wall, received the official sponsorship of the Baptist Missionary Society, while Clarke continued his independent mission in La Spezia, a town on the North Western coast.

James Wall, in Bologna, immediately came in contact with the Italian Free Churches, a movement which arose almost spontaneously through the witnesses of exiles who had to leave Italy in former years for political reasons. Having gone to Britain and Switzerland as refugees, they came back to Italy at the rise of the Italian United Kingdom.

The merging of the three strands of the early Baptist work, namely the English, the American and the Italian, in a time of the strong political ideals such as freedom, democracy, equality, represent the imprinting of Italian Baptist identity. The coming of Baptist missions to Italy attracted people and pastors of the Free Churches because of such principles as freedom of conscience, the separation of Church and State and the practice of the Church as a gathered confessing community



Edward Clarke

of believers who consciously witness to their faith through baptism.

The first Churches founded by the two British missions and the American Mission, immediately opened schools and orphanages and edited the first periodical publications (*Seminatore* in 1876 and *il Testimonio* in 1884). The British Mission in Italy was called Apostolic Christian Church of Italy. In 1878 the General Baptist Missionary Society also sent a missionary, Nathanael Herbert Shaw. The Southern Baptist Convention of the USA sent to Rome William Nelson Cote and after him, in 1873, the Virginian George Boardman Taylor.

It was in May of 1884 in Turin that under the name of the “Christian Apostolic Baptist Union” all Baptist organizations in Italy were united. In the meantime, amidst difficulties and persecutions new Churches were founded in many towns and villages in Italy. In 1890 the Baptist Church members numbered around 1.000 members.

An interview with the President of the Italian Baptist Union

Letting freedom ring

In October 2004 Pastor Anna Maffei was elected President of the Italian Baptist Union by the Baptist General Assembly convening in Rome. Here Anna Maffei answers some questions. (by Marta D'Auria)

- What are the challenges that Baptist Churches face in the Italian context?

«As happens for many Baptist Unions around the world, the Baptist Churches in our country are sociologically speaking a minority religious group, therefore the challenge is that of relevance and visibility. We try to make our voice heard. And it is not easy in a land where the Catholic Church is a giant that has an enormous influence on society, both culturally and politically. The temptation could be to live among ourselves and behave as if we were in a fortress, but many congregations try to overcome this temptation and boldly bring their contribution of faith, of reflection, of social engagement, outside the walls of their Churches. In the end what is really important is faithful discipleship and this cannot but be lived among people in the world that God loves».

- What do you think is the contribution that this little Union of churches can bring to the big Baptist family worldwide?

«Since we are so small, we are also absolutely free from power logics. Our voice therefore is also free. We try - using an expression of Martin Luther King - "to let freedom ring" in and outside our local congregations. It is freedom from prejudice, freedom from racism, freedom from war and violence, freedom from oppression, freedom from discrimination. And finally freedom to talk frankly and, by being ourselves, to choose to relate and work together with others who are different from us but who want to share with us something of their path through life. Maybe something of this emphasis can be helpful to other Baptist believers around the world as well. Maybe».

- It is the first time that a woman has been



elected President of the Italian Baptist Union. How do you read this calling by the Churches to you?

«I take it very seriously. It is a great responsibility that I carry together with the members of the Executive Committee with a great awareness of my limits. I try to organize the work sharing the tasks among us according to a charismatic principle: no one person has been given all gifts, but everyone can use the ones she or he received from the Spirit for the common good. For me the verse of Paul in Romans 12, 3 is extremely important: "I say to everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than you ought to think but to think with sober judgement". This is valid both for women and for men, I think».

- Which is the prayer that has most often accompanied your work in these months?

«I pray a lot for the youth of our Churches. It is a time of great uncertainty, the families are extremely fragile and it seems to me that our children have difficulties in finding a sense in what they do. I pray for the rising of hope but I also pray for love and reconciliation to be found both in the Churches and in the wider world. I pray for a world free from violence».

The mobilization of Churches

Make Poverty History

by Salvatore Rapisarda

An upside-down world

The world is truly upside-down! Those who are rich and powerful often see the poor and the defenceless as their enemy! Rather than challenging poverty they fight the poor. It is, on the contrary, the poor who have the right to see the rich as enemies. They are deprived of the resources they need to live, they are robbed of the land and all that it provides.

An answer from believers

What Christians do need to act before they can approach God with a clear conscience? Jesus answers this question, saying: «Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and then remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to your brother; then come and offer your gift» (Matthew 5: 23-24). Here is what we are called to do: we must reconcile ourselves with the poor.

The word of the prophet

The prophet Micah said: «He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with our God». (Micah 6, 8). In response to this verse, some evangelical Churches have formed a network of people and Churches who want to obey the Lord, by facing the problem of injustice. The Italian Baptist Union has chosen to become an active member of this network called «Micah Challenge».

Old challenges and new opportunities

Today we are challenged to understand that Churches do not only have to care about the intimate aspects of the faith, but they must strive for good, peace (Shalom) for the entire person and to preserve the entire creation.



Objectives of development of the Millennium

In September 2000, the Assembly of the United Nations approved the Millennium Declaration, an important document outlining a new direction for world-wide politics. Here are the Millennium Development Goals, hopefully to be achieved by 2015:

- 1) Eradicate hunger and poverty;
- 2) Have elementary levels of education for all people;
- 3) Promote the equality of gender and revise the role of women (empowerment);
- 4) Reduce child mortality;
- 5) Promote the health of mothers;
- 6) Fight HIV/AIDS, endemic malaria and other diseases;
- 7) Ensure the sustainability of the environment;
- 8) Develop world-wide cooperation for economic and social development.

Concrete acts

Being aware that facts must follow declarations, another international network has been created, called *Global Call to Act Against Poverty*. The Italian Baptist Union and Micah Challenge are also active members within this organization. The aim of this network is to urge world governments to the obligations outlined in the Millennium Declaration.

We ask everyone to sign the appeal for the attainment of these Objectives.

Past. Salvatore Rapisarda - Vice-president of the Italian Baptist Union

Sharing the gifts of God: an experience of enrichment

Faithful to the ministry of acceptance

by Carmine Bianchi

Italy once a land of emigration has changed to become a land of immigration. Approximately 150,000 of those who have immigrated to Italy are Evangelical Christians. Many of them have organized themselves spontaneously into ethnic communities and constituted evangelical Churches comprised primarily of one or two nationalities. Some have chosen to remain independent of mainstream institutions. Many other Churches comprised of foreigners have chosen to integrate themselves into our national organizations.

The concentration of brothers and sisters from other countries is found primarily in North Central Italy. Due to this region's employment prospects, it now contains an estimated immigrant population of 40%. To date, there are 31 ethnic congregations within the Italian Baptist Union.

There are currently dozens of fellowships that are interested in becoming a part of our Baptist family. Churches from Africa (Ghana, Nigeria, Eritrea, the Ivory Coast), Korea, Romania, China, Brazil and the Philippines are part of UCEBI. It would be impossible to enumerate all the nationalities represented in our Churches. There are also

individual churches made up of people from one country or region who are a part of UCEBI family.

Since the beginning of the migratory phenomenon, UCEBI has both recognised the need for and appointed a full time representative to deal with «Immigrant Church» relationships. The «Representative to minority and ethnic churches» has been serving in this capacity since 2002. We have always strived to be pro-active in receiving Christians from sister Churches abroad. We believe the Lord has called us to this work to fulfill three vocations of importance in His Kingdom. By welcoming other Christians from abroad into UCEBI, we exercise the important vocations of: evangelical acceptance, giving value to diversity and safeguarding human rights. It is through this welcome we can fulfill these vocations.

We are deeply convinced that the mission of the Church is to advance the Kingdom of God. The reign of Christ was established in His coming and yet is still growing to fruition. This sense of mission is based on the ministry of Christ. His ministry was, from the beginning, a ministry of acceptance. God calls those who are far way to be a part of His plan of salvation. He receives them as they are. He identifies Himself with them in life and death so they might receive hope. Jesus has made this message clear when He

dined with «those far away». In this way He established a deep communion with them, pre-figuration of the messianic banquet (Luke 14: 15-24). The Baptist Churches, in obedience to this call of acceptance, receive to her bosom these brothers and sisters, those left out of the main stream of society.

The Christian Church, since its beginning, has tried to live as one with all its diversity. In the New Testament we find creative differences in theological positions within the primitive church. God



sees this diversity as richness not impoverishment. The fellowships found in the New Testament were quite different from each another. This diversity served as a catalyst for dialogue between Christians. This dialogue broadened perspectives and enriched all those who were willing to learn them, just as it can today. Scripture emphasizes the international flavour of the early church. The intention of God to move through the Church to reach «every nation» with the Gospel is obvious to all that read the New Testament (Acts 1: 8; 2). UCEBI welcomes the enrichment that is brought by different spirituality and theological opinions. We already enjoy a profitable dialogue that is characterized with mutual respect for differing theological positions.

The ministry of Jesus was characterized by His attention to those found destitute within society. Often within the Gospels we are told of Jesus' choice to work with the disadvantaged and the poor. Jesus showed solidarity with prostitutes, publicans, women, children and foreigners. These often found themselves ostracised by the majority of those living with them in Israel. This is in shocking contrast to the admonition given to them as God's people, «remember the stranger living among you, as you were once strangers in Egypt».

Today, immigrants often find themselves the victims of injustice as a result of racism and xenophobia. In the same way as we dem-

onstrated in our support for the South Africans and their fight against Apartheid, we would like to communicate clearly that for us, racism is totally unacceptable.

The Evangelicals who come from other cultures have shared with our communities a vitality and a freshness for which we are grateful to the Lord. They have greatly added to our services by the sharing of their unique music, the performance of their unique musical instruments, and the offering of prayers in languages other than our own.

To reside in Italy as a foreigner, a person must obtain and maintain documents proving that the Government has given them permission to live here. UCEBI has helped many in this process. As a religious organization which is recognized by the Government of Italy, UCEBI has also been in a position to be able to provide legal sanction for these Churches in order that they can rent property and employ their pastors.

Working with Spurgeon's College in London, we have also been able to help pastors who wish to enter and continue in higher education.

Past. Carmine Bianchi - Representative to



Sing to the Lord a new song!

by Carlo Lella

In Italian Baptist Churches music and singing have always had a very important role during service and evangelisation. There is no good service without music and sometimes finding a good musician for the service is no small worry for a pastor.

The peculiarities of our Churches's singing are a high and clear voice, our eyes up, our hands clapping to different rhythms, our arms risen in sign of worship and thankfulness to God, our creator.

Besides in our services traditional hymns (coming from the production of the Reformation) and modern hymns melt together, different musical instruments like drums and organs unite to unfold a harmonic musical carpet.

Recently the Italian Baptist Union set up a Ministry for music and liturgy. To be honest a minister of music was already working with Italian Baptist Churches before the Eighties: it was carried out by Maestro Jimmy Watts. Jimmy Watts, who worked for Foreign Mission Board, used to visit the Baptist Churches with Stanley Crabb and Lucia Bensi: they sang new hymns and taught them to our communities. Finally, after more

than ten years of experimentation and despite the financial difficulties which UCEBI was experiencing, in 2001 the General Assembly of Baptist Churches decided to institute the Ministry for music which is a specific area of the Department of Evangelisation.

At present the duties of the minister of music include organizing workshops, conferences, evangelisations, training courses for new ministers of music, the preparation of liturgies for special occasions and the editing of new hymns and hymnals.

Besides which, the minister of music is in charge of editing the magazine «Musica nella Liturgia» (Music in Liturgy) which offers reflections to the readers on the important role of music during the services, scores of new hymns produced in other countries and translated into Italian and scores of new songs of worship composed by Italians. Today, if I consider the warm welcome that this ministry receives in the Churches, I trust in God that our Churches will support many other gifted persons willing to work as ministers of music so that the testimony of Gospel in our country could also continue through music.

We have found that in our Churches there are many new musical talents that we have to support and encourage so that new choirs and orchestras will be able to sing and play to praise the Lord.

After all, as we all know, music is one of the most precious gifts that our Lord has given to us: a long time ago King David and his trustworthy musician Asaf already knew how much the Lord loves his singers!

Carlo Lella
- Minister for Music
and Liturgy



The participation of Youth in the life of the Churches

Not ashamed of the Gospel

by Cristina Arcidiacono

It is difficult in so few words to describe the youth of the Italian Baptist Churches (UCEBI). Although it would be impossible to know all of the young people involved, I have had the privilege of meeting many. Each community represents one piece of the multicoloured Italian Baptist mosaic. While attempting to delineate a general view of the Baptist reality, it is important to try to sustain the brightness of every single part of the mosaic.

I will try to describe the personal experience I've had while in Baptist Churches, Youth Centres and the Italian Evangelical Youth Federation (FGEI). I cherish the many encounters and relationships established.

«So do not be ashamed to testify about our Lord» (II Timothy 1, 8). This verse is often used during baptisms, and it expresses the commitment of many youth groups inside our Churches. This commitment does not exist only inside the Church walls but tries to bring the message of love, justice, and the hope of the Gospel to the cities.

Our youth are involved with the liturgy, musical experimentation, management of the community, preaching and Sunday school. Some of these ministries were started by our young people. Our youth are deeply aware of the many challenges our Churches are called to face: unemployment, crime, youth unease, the acceptance of immigrants and relationships with the other Churches.

The commitment for justice and freedom of conscience is an important heritage that the Italian Baptist Churches are bound to pass on to new generations. We hope to maintain the atmosphere of our community as a place open to all ages, where we hope all can praise the Lord and fellowship

together. We encourage everyone to study, to be welcoming, to debate, to pray, to speak and to listen. This is a precious and important environment for those who grow up in our Churches.

Retreats have been a great source of this fellowship and growth for young Baptists scattered throughout Italy. For years the Teen and Youth Camps were held at the Baptist Retreat Centre of Santa Severa (Rome). They have been occasions for the formation of deep friendships and testimony. The retreats held at Youth Centres present opportunities for fellowship. Here young people can have a better opportunity to know themselves and to experience living together.

Many Youth Groups of Baptist Churches actively participate in the Italian Evangelical Youth Federation (FGEI), a network of youth groups made up of Italian Evangelical Churches.

Last April the FGEI national camp on prayer and spirituality was attended by more than one hundred young people. It consisted of four days filled with sharing, prayer and reflection for youth who are not ashamed of the Gospel.

Past. Cristina Arcidiacono - Secretary of the Italian Evangelical Youth Federation (FGEI)



The blessed relationships with other Christian Churches

Part of a wide net

Since their birth about 140 years ago, Italian Baptist Churches have always had strong ties with other Christian Churches abroad. The first historical tie was with the British Baptist Churches through the Baptist Missionary Society while a few years later the Foreign Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention sent the first American missionaries, establishing a spiritual bond with Baptists overseas which has lasted until today. At the beginning of our witness in Italy there were other ties with overseas organisations which only lasted a few years. In recent years, however, new ties have been established.

International Mission Board

The Italian Baptist Union operates according to a cooperative plan for the life and development of Baptist work in Italy. As a structure it is therefore completely independent of support from the Foreign Mission Board (now International Mission Board, IMB). But a few missionary couples from the IMB are working in communion with the Union. The relations between the Italian Baptist Union and the International Mission Board are regulated by an agreement signed in 2003 to safeguard the mutual respect and cooperation in mission, the pivotal principle being «unity in diversity».

Baptist Missionary Society

In recent years the historical tie between Italian Baptists and British Baptists has been revived with a programme of strong support by the BMS of missionary projects in Italy. There are at the moment two British missionary couples, the McFarlanes, in the town of Barletta, and the Ords, in Genova. Moreover the BMS every year funds according to Italian Baptist requests specific projects connected with mission, pastoral care and church growth and helps with scholarships for theological students.

Junta de Missões Mundial du Brasil (Brazilian Mission)

One of the most dynamic Baptist missionary movements in the world is Brazilian. For the past



15 years Brazilian missionaries funded by the Junta have been planting new Churches in Italy. The new Churches, situated in the North Eastern part of the country, are not only made up of Brazilian migrant workers but also by Italians. The work they do with young people and families is wonderful.

Virginia Baptist Missionary Association

In 2004 the Italian Baptist Union started a programme of partnership with the Virginian Baptists reviving an ancient historical tie which goes back to the very first American missionaries in the 1860s and 70s who were from Virginia. The method of this partnership in mission is different from the others, since it tends to involve local congregations both in Italy and Virginia in a very creative way through the exchange of Churches and youth groups, choirs, church growth experts.

The Lott Carey Convention

The partnership with the Lott Carey Convention (USA) has just begun. The convention has chosen the Italian Baptist Union (UCEBI) as its first European Baptist Union working partner. The spiritual tie that we mutually recognize in Martin Luther King's message marks this partnership in a special way. The partnership will help Italian Baptists particularly with the African migrant Churches in Italy which are members of the Union and with youth ministry.



The dialogue between Christians of different denominations

Unity in diversity

by Lidia Maggi

Italian Baptists Churches came into being in a country with an overwhelming Catholic majority. Their mandate was to call to biblical faithfulness all those who based their religious beliefs on tradition or were indifferent. Today, in name of that same faithfulness, these Churches are convinced that their path lies in ecumenism. Discipleship of Jesus in history, in fact, calls for freedom and a discerning mentality which cannot be expressed by maintaining their original stance. Ecclesiastes would say «there's a time for breaking and a time for mending!».

Today Italian Baptist Churches are strongly committed to ecumenism.

What do we mean by ecumenism? Not a generic attitude of tolerance, based on the belief that religious experiences are all the same. We follow an ecumenism «which is at a high price», in which religious freedom, so dear to Baptist tradition, is not to be confused with indifference between Christians of different denominations, an ecumenism that does not mistake the unity proclaimed by Christ (John 17) with uniformity, but seeks it in the prospect of «ecumenism in diversity». What is at stake on the path of ecumenism is nothing less than the biblical quality of faith. We cannot limit the Word of the Gospel to how it is understood by each individual Church. We need the witness of other denominations to respond to God's call. With Paolo we must recognise that «there are many different organs, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I do not need you"; nor the head to the feet, "I do not need you" (1 Corinthians 12: 20-21)».

Without doing away with the differences between the various Churches, the ecumenical spirit tries to make this diversity fruitful. We don't want to give up our specific characteristics, our membership to a particular denomination, because it is in the concrete experience of the Church that a mature



and responsible faith bears fruit. However, we feel we must accept the prophetic force which ecumenical commitment entails.

Today as Italian Baptists we are called to reiterate our tradition, no longer being polemical, but ready to listen to others. We feel that in announcing the gospel we must be willing to be questioned. We fear a society that is ever less willing to debate. In the ecumenical prospect diversity becomes dialogue: brothers and sisters question each other, in absolute frankness, their goal is to be converted together to that Gospel where no one is master and all are disciples. It is, therefore, an encouragement to seek to belong to Christ and respond to the call to evangelisation with a missionary zeal, without mistaking this evangelisation for propaganda of their own Church.

Past. Lidia Maggi, member of the Department of Evangelisation

Pray and work for peace

Here follows the letter that our President, pastor Anna Maffei sent, carrying out a decision made by the 38th General Assembly of the Baptist Churches, sent in October 2004 to the brothers and sisters in USA. The letter was born from the deep conviction that war is not the right answer to conflicts and from the belief that there are other paths that must be followed to avoid war, which always causes death, poverty and suffering to the powerless: women, children and old people.

In response to the present wars as well as those wars which threaten to be fought against all those who menace the security of our Countries, the Italian Baptist Churches believe that is their task to affirm the priority of the ministry of peace.

Together, as disciples of Jesus Christ, we believe in a God of peace, reconciliation and justice, who has told us «You shall not murder» and Who calls us to pray and work for peace.

Dear brothers and sisters, Both our countries have their armies in Iraq with the objective, laid out by our Governments, of determining who will guide that unfortunate land, and how.

An expensive war. Your country with the 157 billion dollar spent on the war, could have housed, educated and offered and offered assistance to tens of thousands of destitute Americans. Our country will have spent 220 million euro on the war in Iraq, but has not made its promised contribution, of 100 million euro, to the Monetary Fund for the fight against Aids, TB and malaria.

A bloody war. 1.157 coalition soldiers have been killed, 1.057 of them Americans. 150 civil contractors and between 13.000-15.000 Iraqis, more than half of whom were civilians, have also been killed.

A devastating war. 2.200 tons bombs containing diluted uranium (according to official Pentagon statistics) have led to the destruction of entire communities, the loss of 2.000 schools, the disabling of the health service, the ruin of manufacturing structures, the pollution water supplies and the end of human rights, to say nothing of the torture and deaths under interrogation.

An illegal war (according to UN Secretary Kofi Annan). The justification for this war was the lie of Saddam's weapons of mass destruction and his links with Al Qaida (this according to the UN inspectors and the enquiry commission of your Congress).

A mistaken and counterproductive war, according to the international peace movement and public opinion of the countries involved in the war. This war has led to an increase in recruitment for Al Qaida of up to 18.000 men (according to the Institute for Strategic Studies), whilst 50.000 men in Iraq have enrolled in the resistance against the occupation of their land.

Our Governments claim that their intentions are good, in fact our Italian government states that it is not at war at all! The objective is to guarantee Iraqis the possibility of having democratic elections; but democracy cannot be imposed by war. The war has instead caused terrorism to flare up in a land where there wasn't any before and has restricted democracy in the countries involved in the war, through security measures, clamping down on the right to protest and the tampering with the question of freedom of information.

We all watch with anguish and a sense of impotence, the news reels showing the massacre of innocents, produced by terrorist suicide bombers and car bombs and by coalition missiles, following





the law of «an eye for and eye».

We all see our leaders, in the same vein as the exponents of Islamic fundamentalism and of terrorism, waving the flag, talking of a war between civilisations and claiming that God is on their side.

We believe that God, who said «you shall not kill» and who send Jesus to die for our sin, is a God of peace, of reconciliation and of justice, that he is on the side of the victims of war, whoever they are, military or civilian, Iraqi, American, widows, parents, orphans, prisoners, whole peoples reduced to misery and famine.

We cannot and we must not, dear sisters and brothers, limit ourselves to indignation and condemnation. No matter how small and weak we feel there is a pressing need for collaboration who would be pace makers, Christians and non Christians, in Europe, America and the Middle East. Jesus said Blessed are the peacemakers. We are called to trace alternatives to war, knowing that in the past when we have done so, with faith and perseverance, they have led to important results against terrorism and dictatorships. Diplomacy, Intelligence, economic pressure, patient dialogue and even marches and public manifestations.

In your great Country you have just had your

election campaign, we go to the ballot in the spring-time. The dilemma, however, remains: continue along the road of war or follow the paths of peace. What can we do, you and us?

We suggest two types of initiative.

1. Manifestations, round tables, focus groups, meetings for reflection on the alternative to war, that involve people of diverse religious confession, cultural tendency, and nationality.
2. Ecumenical prayer meetings in which we pray that God touches our leaders hearts and those of terrorist and resistance leaders and that he brings them to repent, to change direction, to stop the fighting and open up a dialogue with their enemies, to laid together the timing of exchange of occupation forces for UN led peace keeping forces.

We will be grateful to God for a response from you and for any advice you may want to give us.

That He may bless your efforts for peace.

Shalom, Salam, Peace.

*On behalf of the General Assembly
of the Italian Baptist Union
The President Anna Maffei
Rome October 10, 2004*



Confession of Faith of the Baptist Churches adhering to UCEBI

Preamble

The Churches, that in Italy were born through the preaching of Baptist preachers soon after the achievement of the political unity of Italy and those that in the course of time have established bonds of fraternity with them, are now parts of the fellowship of the Evangelical Baptist Union of Italy (UCEBI).

Historically they link themselves in the tradition that goes back to the Apostles and that in the course of time has stressed the primitive faith as it is expressed in the Scriptures, in the terms of the renewal of the Spirit (Middle Ages), of the Reformation (XVI and XVII centuries) and the missionary effort (XVIII and XIX centuries).

They today declare to undertake Christ's discipleship, in the clarity of their identity of faith and in the ethical awareness of witness, and therefore they affirm to be willing to express this bound in the practical cooperation and in the following declarations of faith.

Art. 1 (Sola Gratia) - God accomplishes the work of creation, of judgement and of salvation of the world and every single person only by His grace.

Art. 2 (Solus Cristus) - God the Father accomplishes his work through His only begotten son, Jesus Christ, Word made man who died on the cross for the sin of mankind, who rose for the justification of every believer, and who is Lord and Saviour of the world.

Art. 3 (Sola Scriptura) - The Bible is the unique authentic witness of the work of God through Jesus Christ. In so far as the Holy Spirit makes it the Word of God, it must be studied, honoured and obeyed.

Art. 4 (Human nature) - Humanity, alienated from God and divided within itself can not work or even hope for its own salvation: only God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit accomplishes by grace the salvation of humanity and of the world.

Art. 5 (Sola Fide) The word of God, incarnated in Jesus Christ, witnessed in the Bible and pro-

claimed through the preaching of the Gospel can be accepted only by faith. Men and women, being sinners obtain justification and reconciliation through faith and repentance.

Art. 6 (The Holy Spirit) - The Holy Spirit, who inspired the prophets and who witnesses the truth and sanctifies, gives the believers certainty of God's faithfulness and manifest Himself in various gifts and in vocations to serve the Lord in the Church and in the whole world.

Art. 7 (Christian Discipleship) - Whoever hears and accepts the word of Christ has to follow the Lord as a disciple. This discipleship implies to bear for love's sake, serious responsibilities, never exempt from contradictions and dangers of compromises, yet always animated by the hope of the kingdom of God.

Art. 8 (The Church) - The Church of Christ is wherever believers are gathered together by the word or the Gospel to listen to it again and again, to share in the Lord's Supper, to strengthen the bond of love, to make disciples through the teaching and baptism, because Christ is in their midst.

Each Church so gathered, organises itself in places and given times according to the word of the Gospel and under the authority of Christ alone. Each Church has equal dignity in front of the Lord, each receives from the Spirit ministries, able to answer effectively to their calling and each is required to favour the unity of the Spirit with the bond of peace.

We believe that the Church of the Lord, thus characterised during history, is one in Christ, holy in the Spirit, apostolic in derivation and mission, universal in its horizon according to the Gospel that gives her life and that she proclaims.

Art. 9 (Baptism) - Baptism in water of those who confess their faith is the first act of obedience of each Christian person. It is administered by the Church in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

By virtue of the baptism in the Spirit, which



makes effective the baptism in water, believers are born to new life and are united in the body of Christ.

Art. 10 (Lord's Supper) - The Lord's Supper that we, united in the unique body of Christ, celebrate sharing bread and wine, is memory of the work accomplished by the Lord for our salvation and it is preaching of His death for us until the day in which the risen Lord comes.

The Lord invites us to eat bread and drink wine to affirm again in the present the commitment that unites us and the promise of the time when He will gather his own in the banquet of new Heaven and new Earth.

Art. 11 (Universal priesthood of all believers)

- Jesus Christ is the only mediator between God and mankind. Every disciple has access to God only through Christ.

The mandate, entrusted to them by the Lord, to share the Gospel with their fellow men and women, constitutes them authoritative messengers of the word under the exclusive authority of Christ and by the effective working of the Holy Spirit.

Art. 12 (The ministries) - In order to equip the Church with the essential gifts to make it living body of Christ, the Holy Spirit calls different believers to fulfil different ministries. We recognise that today, in the first place, they are ministries for the proclamation of the word, for Bible and theological teaching, for the ruling of the Church and for the service of the Church in the world: we are also ready to recognise any other gift that the Spirit awakes in the Church.

The relationship among the ministries is not hierarchical, but organic; every one, and each for his or her part, cooperates in the life of the Church.

Art. 13 (The mission of the Church) - The Church is called to fulfil the mandate of Christ. Therefore, she has to preach the Gospel of the coming kingdom, to engage in healing of the sick and in the emancipation of the oppressed.

The witness that the Church as a body will offer to the love of God for all the world becomes credible when implies practical love, shown in mutual help, in reconciliation and in peace.

Art. 14 (Ethics) - Ethical decisions that qualify Christian discipleship have to be taken by virtue of the strength of the love shown in Christ and with a sense of responsibility towards God, towards every person and towards creation. Such decisions

are inspired and oriented by the word of God and become practical actions that may be in line with commonly recognised values, but may also become modernising and revolutionary actions.

Art. 15 (Reconciliation) - Baptist Churches engage in promoting reconciliation with God and among human beings. We feel called to engage in promoting justice, peace, freedom and respect for the rights of mankind and the entire creation.

Art. 16 (Church and State) - We believe that the authority established by God is ordained to enable peaceful, free and just living of every single person and all peoples. We acknowledge that the modern democratic State, even with all the contradictions proper in any human society, shows clear signs of the redeeming work of God in history. The role of the Church of Christ, distinct from the one of the State, consists in realising her own mission in coordination with State policy, but if it is the case, even in denouncing those degenerating actions that restrict freedom and corrupt justice.

Art. 17 (Ecumenism) - The Church is one in Christ. The Lord calls us to realise such unity in a visible way. We are, therefore, called to work in order to abolish, in a spirit of prayer, in the common listening to the word of the Lord and in brotherly dialogue, the existing divisions among the Churches. We trust that the ecumenical engagement realised among similar Evangelical Churches, far from excluding more problematic relationships with other Churches, leads the way to full reciprocal recognition among Churches in such a way that it is both safeguard of each Church's specificity and a step towards the day when God will be all in all.

Art. 18 (Religion and religions) - Religion is the human activity universal and manifold, meant to cultivate the relationship with what one believes that transcends worldly reality in all its dimensions. Religion, as human work, is under God's judgement.

Therefore, while we realise our calling in proclaiming the Gospel of the grace of God in Christ, it is not our duty to judge, but we are called to respect each person's freedom rights.

Art. 19 (Christian hope) - The Lord Jesus Christ, according to his promise, will return to gather his Church, to judge the world, to defeat death through the resurrection of the dead and to establish his kingdom. New Heaven and new Earth await the redeemed.

Evangelical Christian Baptist Union of Italy (U.C.E.B.I.)

Piazza S. Lorenzo in Lucina 35 - 00186 Roma
tel. 06.68.76.124 / 06.68.72.261 - fax 06.68.76.185
e-mail: ucebi@ucebi.it

President:

Past. Anna Maffei

e-mail: presidente@ucebi.it

Vice-President:

Past. Salvatore Rapisarda

e-mail: sdmrapis@tin.it

Department of Theology:

Past. Massimo Aprile

e-mail: massimo.aprile@ucebi.it

Department of Evangelisation:

Past. Carmine Bianchi

e-mail: carmine.bianchi@ucebi.it

Ministry for Music:

M° Carlo Lella

e-mail: carlo.lella@ucebi.it

Rest-home: "**G. B. Taylor**":

Via delle Spighe 8 - 00172 Roma;

e-mail: istituto.taylor@tiscali.net.it

If you would like to give financially to UCEBI or some specific projects (e.g. supporting the Elderly who live in "G. B. Taylor" Institute)

Beneficiary Name: Ente Patrimoniale dell'Unione Cristiana Evangelica Battista

Beneficiary Address: Piazza di San Lorenzo in Lucina, 35 - 00186 Roma - ITALY

Account Number: 1048

Bank Name: Banca Popolare di Novara - Roma Ag. 1

Bank Address: Via Di Campo Marzio 67-68 - 00186 ROMA (RM) - ITALY

IBAN Code: IT35-U-05608-03201-001048

SWIFT Code: NVRBIT21061

