

Andrea Annese

**From Risorgimento and Reform to Wesley and Revival: Methodist Strategies  
in Post-Unitary Italy (1861-1890)**

The origins (and the development) of Italian Methodism are closely related with the concepts of “revival,” “reform,” and “revolution,” the key themes of this OIMTS conference.<sup>1</sup> Methodism was propagated in Italy by missionaries, arrived in the context of Risorgimento’s completion: the British Wesleyans from 1861 (the year of the Italian unification), while the American Episcopal Methodists from 1871 (after the annexation of Rome and the Papal States, 1870).<sup>2</sup> Both in Britain and United States the idea that this process of socio-political reform would have been associated with a religious reform, even a revolution (i.e., the replacement of Catholicism with Protestantism), was common: this is what the historian Giorgio Spini called “the myth of Protestant Italy.”<sup>3</sup> This “Protestant dream” (as it has been also named)<sup>4</sup> was shared by the Italian Protestants and influenced the strategies of the foreign missionary societies, that at first tried to support the cause for a unified Italian Protestant Church, that is, for an Italian *Reform(ation)*.<sup>5</sup> Nevertheless, emerging divisions and conflicts among the Italian denominations convinced the missionaries that it was worthwhile founding an Italian *Methodist* Church. Therefore, both the Wesleyans and the Episcopal Methodists made their best to propagate the specific Methodist doctrines, through publications such as translations of John Wesley’s works, books of *Doctrines and Discipline*, magazines, etc. It would be wrong, then, thinking that nineteenth-century Italian Methodism dealt only with practical issues, such as the establishment of schools and churches. It did produce a theological effort, especially revolving around Wesley, on the one hand, and Patristic texts, on the other hand. Wesley’s theology was recalled in order to nourish Italian Methodism with the spirit of the Evangelical Revival; the “Fathers” were often employed to fight the (Catholic) adversary with its own weapons, i.e. in a controversialist context. These two perspectives were intertwined (one could think of Wesley’s own use of the Fathers). On the opposite,

---

<sup>1</sup> “*Thy Grace Restore, Thy Work Revive*”: *Revival, Reform, and Revolution in Global Methodism*. I sincerely thank all the participants of the working group “Methodist History” for their comments and suggestions. I am particularly indebted to Glen O’Brien for his comments on my English text.

<sup>2</sup> On the history of Methodism in Italy, see A. Annese, *Tra Riforma e patristica. Il metodismo in Italia dall’Unità al caso Buonaiuti* (Rome: Viella, 2018); F. Chiarini, *Storia delle Chiese metodiste in Italia (1859-1915)* (Turin: Claudiana, 1999); P. Naso, ed., *Il metodismo nell’Italia contemporanea. Cultura e politica di una minoranza tra Ottocento e Novecento* (Rome: Carocci, 2012); for a wider context, G. Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti* (Turin: Claudiana, 1998 [or. ed. 1956]); Id., *Italia liberale e protestanti* (Turin: Claudiana, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, title of chap. VIII. For a recent and valuable synthesis of the relationship between Italian Protestantism and Risorgimento, see L. Vogel, “Protestants in the Italian Risorgimento,” in R. Dagnino, A. Grazi, eds., *Believers in the Nation. European Religious Minorities in the Age of Nationalism (1815-1914)* (Leuven: Peeters, 2017), 157-77.

<sup>4</sup> S. Nitti, “Il sogno protestante,” in A. Melloni (dir.), *Cristiani d’Italia. Chiese, società, Stato, 1861-2011*, 2 vols. (Rome: Istituto della Enciclopedia Italiana, 2011), 1:183-96.

<sup>5</sup> Until 1861 (1848 in Piedmont), propagating Protestant doctrines was prohibited in Italy.

Italian Methodism dealt far less with the Magisterial Reformation (at least until the 1930s). All of this seems to outline a framework in which the key reference point, for the nineteenth-century Italian Methodists, came to be *revival*, more than reform.

The publications that I mentioned above are the fundamental sources to understand the development of the Methodist strategies in post-unitary Italy and their relation to reform and Revival. I will analyze a selection of the most important publications from the years 1861-1890, focusing on their reception of John Wesley and of the early Christian literature. As we will see, several of these texts had also a pivotal *practical* role, for the establishment of the two Methodist Churches in Italy (which would merge in 1946), both in doctrinal and organizational perspective.

1. For what concerns the British Wesleyan mission, one may distinguish between two phases, the first half and the second half of the 1860s. In the latter, the “denominational turn” affects, and interacts with, the development of the editorial projects. The first real “specific” publications of Italian Methodism date back to 1867-1869 (when the Italian Wesleyan Methodist Church was also established) and were promoted by the Superintendent Henry James Piggott (1831-1917),<sup>6</sup> the key figure of Italian Wesleyan Methodism from 1861 to the early twentieth century. Those publications (to which I will come back later) are the magazines, both directed by Piggott, *Il Museo Cristiano* (1867-1868) and *Il Corriere Evangelico* (1869-1876), which replaced the former, and the volumes *Breve storia del metodismo fino alla morte di Giovanni Wesley* and *Wesley’s Ventidue sermoni*, both edited by Piggott and published in 1868.<sup>7</sup>

However, the first attempts to spread the Methodist doctrines date back already to the very first years of the Wesleyan mission, during the first phase, though they were less systematic and focused. The Wesleyan missionaries wanted to disseminate Methodist texts, along with others, and made plans in this sense.<sup>8</sup> Among their first publications there were: an Italian translation of the *Second Catechism*; a sermon by Wesley, also in translation (*La via che mena al Regno [The Way to the Kingdom]*, Florence, 1863); a number of pamphlets, some controversialist treatises, and some texts that, however, were not “Methodist,” e.g. a response to Renan’s *Life of Jesus*. Not so much, as Piggott wrote in a letter to the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) in November 1864, where, listing them, he drew up a sort of assessment.<sup>9</sup> Therein, he also mentioned two magazines, *Letture di Famiglia* (on which he had collaborated) and *Il Raccoglitore Evangelico* (which he had

---

<sup>6</sup> See C.J. Davey, R. Kissack, “Piggott, Henry James,” in N.B. Harmon, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 2 vols. (Nashville [TN]: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1974), 2:1914-5; T.C. Piggott, T. Durlay, *Life and Letters of Henry James Piggott, B.A., Of Rome* (London: Epworth Press – J. Alfred Sharp, 1921).

<sup>7</sup> E. [= H.J.] Piggott, *Breve storia del metodismo fino alla morte di Giovanni Wesley nel 1790 [but 1791]* (Padua: Bassanesi, 1868); G. [= J.] Wesley, *Venti-due [sic] sermoni per il Rev. Giovanni Wesley A.M., fondatore delle Chiese evangeliche dette metodiste* (Padua: Bassanesi, 1868).

<sup>8</sup> There are numerous attestations of this intention. The very first is emblematic: the *Report* read during the April 1861 Meeting of the Wesleyan Methodist Missionary Society (WMMS) informs us that, just short after the arrival of the first Methodist missionary in Italy, Richard Green (1829-1907) – and before having founded communities! – it was being planned to print twelve of Wesley’s sermons, which had been translated into Italian ([WMMS,] *The Wesleyan Missionary Notices* [London, 1861], 92). For economic reasons, however, the project was postponed: only one sermon was printed, in 1863, before Piggott’s 1868 collection.

<sup>9</sup> “In the way of direct publication we have not ventured on much.” I quote this letter from the version printed in *Missionary Notices*, 1864, 193-6 (where it is dated Milan, November 1864, without mentioning the day), for I could not find the original, which does not seem to me to be present in the corresponding archival collection. The letters which the missionaries in Italy sent to the WMMS are stored in the Methodist Missionary Society Archives (at SOAS – University of London), sect. Europe, Correspondence, *Italy 1861-1936*, boxes 77-78 and 691-697; they are available in microfiches (FBN 21-24). I will cite them as “MMSA, Corresp.,” followed by the letter’s details (sender, location, date).

directed). In his letters and reports, Piggott also listed other expected publications, which – mainly because of the lack of funding – it had been impossible to print: others of Wesley’s sermons and the translation of William Arthur’s *The Tongue of Fire*, all of them already finished, plus a compendium of theology that Piggott had begun to write.<sup>10</sup> In these sources, Piggott strongly insisted on the idea that to realize such projects was *needed*: for him, those publications were necessary to the evangelistic work, even in a phase when the establishment of an Italian Methodist Church was not envisaged yet. As said above, the first missionaries’ plan was to cooperate with the other Evangelical groups existing in Italy (mainly Free Churches and Waldensians).<sup>11</sup>

This framework significantly changed from mid-1865, when Piggott seemed to convince himself more and more about the need to change perspective and to pursue a denominational way.<sup>12</sup> During this period, in fact, conflicts and controversies had emerged within Italian Protestantism: each denomination was taking its own path, and it became increasingly clear that the creation of a united Church was unfeasible. A unification (or alliance) project promoted by Luigi Desantis in 1864 did not achieve its realization. Especially after 1863, the Italian Free Churches came into conflict with the other Protestant groups, and became also divided themselves into two separate branches, the (“Plymouthist”) Church of the Brethren and the Italian Free Church (*Chiesa Cristiana Libera in Italia*, formally established in 1870), organized along Presbyterian lines. Thus, Piggott realized that Wesleyan Methodism also had to be established in its autonomy. Probably he was driven also by soteriological and ecclesiological reasons, namely the will to mark the difference between Methodism and the (Calvinist) Swiss or Scottish Free Churches, on the one hand, and between Methodism and Plymouth Brethren, on the other hand.<sup>13</sup>

The process of autonomous denominational constitution, for the Wesleyans, reached its peak (and conclusion) in 1868-1869; it was also by virtue of this new situation that the editorial projects of these years would have a new character, and would have the possibility of being developed in a more systematic way. These two dimensions are connected. This is apparent also by the fact that the two volumes, *Breve storia del metodismo* and Wesley’s *Ventidue sermoni*, were used to discuss the doctrinal and organizational issues of the nascent Italian Methodist Church, during the Conference held in Parma, in July 1868 – a series of meetings between Piggott and the evangelists of Northern Italy, which resulted in the decision to found an Italian Methodist Church and, consequently, to ask the British parent Church for official recognition. The British Conference then sent its delegates, and in October 1869 the Reverends George Perks and William Gibson recognized the Italian preachers, ordaining them as Methodist ministers.<sup>14</sup> Thus was born the *Chiesa Evangelica Metodista in Italia*, as it was called. The importance (also practical) of the two volumes edited by Piggott is clear: the

---

<sup>10</sup> MMSA, Corresp., H.J. Piggott, Milan, September 9, 1864; cf. also the November 1864 letter quoted in the previous note. The first translation of Arthur’s book appeared some years later: *La lingua di fuoco, ossia la vera potenza del cristianesimo* (Florence: Claudiana, 1874).

<sup>11</sup> As Piggott said in mid-1861: “If we could simply labour to help the Italians to form a National Reformed Church, without attempting at all to proselyte [*sic*] to Methodism, we should do more for the real good of the country than we could upon any other plan” (Piggott, Durley, *Life and Letters of Henry James Piggott*, 50).

<sup>12</sup> Cf. MMSA, Corresp., H.J. Piggott, Milan, June 4, 1865.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. G. Spini, “Profilo storico della presenza metodista in Italia,” in F. Chiarini, ed., *Il metodismo italiano (1861-1991)* (Turin: Claudiana, 1997), 7-28: 9).

<sup>14</sup> Two ceremonies were held: in Parma for the North District, and in Naples for the South. See “Riconoscimento dei ministri della Chiesa Metodista Italiana,” *Il Corriere Evangelico*, 1 (1869): 129-30, on Parma, and F. Sciarelli, *I miei ricordi (1837-1899)* (Salerno: Tip. Fratelli Jovane, 1900), 104-6, on Naples. The British 1870 Annual Conference ratified these decisions, cf. “Conferenza Generale della Chiesa Metodista della Gran Bretagna. II,” *Il Corriere Evangelico*, 2 (1870): 129-31.

manuscript minutes of the 1868 Parma Conference inform us about the will to know the “distinctive doctrines [*dottrine distintive*]” of Methodism and its organization, and state that those texts were prepared for this purpose.<sup>15</sup> Piggott, in a long letter to the WMMS,<sup>16</sup> describes how it worked: each evangelist was asked whether the *doctrines* contained in those volumes corresponded to his own understanding of the teachings of Scripture (the answer was affirmative); then the compendium of Methodist *discipline* included in the *Breve storia* as an appendix (concerning the more organizational, ecclesiological issues) was read and approved, “article by article.”

2. Before analyzing in detail these volumes, it is worth briefly describing the two periodicals mentioned above, starting with *Il Museo Cristiano*, founded and directed by Piggott at the beginning of 1867. To be more exact, it is not yet a specific, denominational Methodist magazine, nor does it want to spread the Methodist doctrines; its manifesto does not refer to Methodism, but to the recovery of a “pure Christianity [*Cristianesimo puro*].”<sup>17</sup> The *Museo* seems to be less oriented toward anti-Catholic controversy, compared with other Protestant magazines of that time; rather, it highlights the importance of personal, inner conversion (in clear continuity with the theology of Revival). Also noteworthy is the frequent presence of Patristic references. The journal included columns such as *Quello che dicono i Padri sulla lettura della Santa Bibbia*, an anthological series of (translated) Patristic passages, whose theme is the content and interpretation of the Scriptures. The authors considered are John Chrysostom, Augustine, Jerome, and Gregory the Great.<sup>18</sup> That interest for the Patristic texts has its roots exactly in the attitude of John Wesley, who often resorted to Patristic *auctoritates*, and had published texts from the early Christian literature in his collection *Christian Library*; eighteenth-century Italian Methodism adopted this perspective, especially during its first decades.<sup>19</sup>

*Il Museo Cristiano* was published from January 5, 1867 to December 26, 1868. The Conference (or Synod) held in July 1868 decided to replace it with a periodical that was, for the first time, specifically denominational: the result would be *Il Corriere Evangelico*. It was the same Conference where the decision to establish an Italian Wesleyan Church was taken: it becomes evident how editorial projects ran parallel to ecclesiastical configuration. *Il Corriere Evangelico* was published from February 1869 to December 1876, initially as a monthly, then as a bimonthly, at last as a weekly magazine. Its first subtitle, *Bollettino di notizie Evangeliche, ed organo particolare del Metodismo in Italia*, is telling and immediately makes explicit the denominational character of the journal. The *Corriere*'s first issue contains the manifesto of this magazine, as well as the article *Spiegazioni*, which clearly shows how the strategy had developed: it states that, since the idea of a

---

<sup>15</sup> *Resoconto d'una Conferenza di Alcuni Ministri della Chiesa Evangelica Metodista in Italia tenutasi in Parma nei giorni 14. 15. 16. 17. Luglio 1868*, in Archivio storico delle Chiese metodiste [at Archivio della Tavola Valdese, Torre Pellice, Italy], series 1, folder 2: *Verballi dei Sinodi generali e distrettuali della Chiesa Metodista Wesleyana 1868-1885*.

<sup>16</sup> MMSA, Corresp., H.J. Piggott, Padua, July 17, 1868.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. *Il Museo Cristiano*, 1 (1867): 416; ET is mine.

<sup>18</sup> Excerpts from these authors can be found in several issues of *Museo*, from March 30 to December 28, 1867.

<sup>19</sup> On the reception of ancient Christianity in Italian Methodism see Annese, *Tra Riforma e patristica*. Cf. G. Rinaldi, “La santificazione in Wesley come tema ecumenico,” in A. Annese, ed., *Ecumenismo e cattolicità delle Chiese. Il contributo del metodismo* (Rome: Carocci, 2016), 76-100, esp. 100: “La controversia anticattolica dei metodisti italiani dell'Ottocento grondava di citazioni patristiche. L'*argumentum patristicum* era lo strumento ideale per confutare il cattolicesimo con le sue stesse armi. Le loro pagine sembrano sviluppare quanto Wesley aveva scritto nella sua confutazione del *Roman Catechism*.” On Wesley and the “Fathers” see also T.A. Campbell, *John Wesley and Christian Antiquity. Religious Vision and Cultural Change* (Nashville [TN]: Kingswood, 1991); Id., “Wesley’s Use of the Church Fathers,” *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 51/1 (1996): 57-70.

unified Protestant Italian Church has proven to be utopian, unfeasible, it is appropriate that every Church keeps its own autonomy.<sup>20</sup>

Notwithstanding its denominational character, *Il Corriere Evangelico* does not contain many articles about Methodism. In some cases, however, in continuity with *Il Museo Cristiano* and with Wesley, the Patristic interest reemerges: in addition to a number of quotations scattered in various articles, there appeared certain contributions explicitly dedicated to early Christian texts, such as the *First Epistle of Clement* and the *Shepherd of Hermas*.<sup>21</sup>

3. At this juncture, it is possible to analyze the important volumes that the Wesleyans published in 1868, the *Breve storia del metodismo fino alla morte di Giovanni Wesley* and Wesley's *Ventidue sermoni*, both edited by Piggott (though in the latter his name does not appear).<sup>22</sup> The *Breve storia* describes the life of Wesley and the development of the Methodist movement up to 1791. The choice to limit the time span as not to go beyond Wesley's death seems to display a certain Methodist characteristic, namely the will to put aside dogmatic rigidity and denominational "jealousy," rather interpreting Methodism as a renewal (or, better, revival) movement *within* the (one) universal Church (cf. below, about Wesley's sermons). In his preface, Piggott explains that, until Wesley's death, Methodism was not yet a separate denomination or Church, but "a movement common to all Churches."<sup>23</sup> Drawing its history is then, according to Piggott, drawing the history of one of the renewal movements within Christianity, whose meaning is not limited to certain ages or areas.

Among the theological cores which the volume highlights there is justification by faith, the cornerstone of the Reformation which Piggott outlines also referring to Paul's *Epistle to the Romans*. Another pivotal source for Wesley was the Pietist tradition, which the father of Methodism knew through his contacts with the Moravians: this led him to stress the *personal* experience of conversion and "awakening." Piggott also addresses the issue of Wesley's Arminianism, explaining the difference between this view and George Whitefield's Calvinism (which caused the separation between them).<sup>24</sup> Piggott knew that the theology of the Waldensian Church in Italy had a Calvinist character,<sup>25</sup> and decided to clearly present the Wesleyan theology in its different, Arminian nature.

Also noteworthy is the fact that Piggott exhibits here the above-mentioned "Protestant dream," i.e. the idea of an Italian religious *reform* which would have to complement the political reform of Risorgimento. Piggott introduces this idea by drawing a parallel between the eighteenth-century British context, where (according to him) Wesley had a great influence, and the post-unitary Italian context. In England, he writes, the Reformation initially developed on the "political" and "patriotic" level (the Church of England would be a reaction to Catholicism, perceived as a foreign intrusion), but the "spiritual" side – a real conversion of the hearts – was lacking. According to Piggott, Wesley

---

<sup>20</sup> "Spiegazioni," *Il Corriere Evangelico*, 1 (1869): 2-4.

<sup>21</sup> "Epistola di S. Clemente I ai Corinti," *Il Corriere Evangelico*, 6 (1874): 212-3; "Il Libro del Pastore di Erma," *ibid.*, 404-5.

<sup>22</sup> As Franco Chiarini writes, they exemplarily witness "il tentativo di portare il messaggio teologico metodista in Italia" (Chiarini, *Storia delle Chiese metodiste*, 37).

<sup>23</sup> Piggott, *Breve storia*, 8, trans. mine. Piggott writes that, until Wesley's death, "la Storia del Metodismo non è tanto la Storia di una Chiesa particolare quanto di un movimento comune a tutte le Chiese [...]. Continuare la storia sarebbe stata racchiuderla entro i limiti d'una sola denominazione" (7-8).

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Piggott, *Breve storia*, 100-9; on the anti-Calvinist controversy see also *ibid.*, 162-8. Cf. A.C. Outler, ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 425-91.

<sup>25</sup> In a letter of July 23, 1862 he writes: "È necessario contrattaccare il sapore piuttosto forte di calvinismo che pervade qui la letteratura evangelica" (quoted in W.P. Stephens, "Le origini britanniche della Chiesa metodista italiana," in Chiarini, ed., *Il metodismo italiano*, 29-46: 43).

brought this spiritual awakening and fulfilled the British Reformation.<sup>26</sup> Piggott hopes that a similar fulfillment may take place in Italy as well.

4. John Wesley preached thousands of sermons, of which he published about one hundred and fifty: Piggott, in the anthology *Ventidue sermoni*, selected “a series of the more directly doctrinal” of them.<sup>27</sup> The volume opens with a preface (*Avvertenza preliminare*) where the editor (Piggott) explains, indeed, that these selected sermons are considered as a “doctrinal standard text” by every Methodist Church in the world. Nevertheless, the preface continues, it is not for this reason that they are translated and presented to the Italian readers, but because they exhibit in a limpid way “those fundamental truths on which all the Evangelical Churches agree.”<sup>28</sup> This clarification, far from representing a withdrawal from the will to spread the Methodist theological message, is to be understood rather as a position that is in itself fully “Methodist,” and “Wesleyan.” One of the main features of the Methodist theological perspective, in fact, is an “ecumenicity” that may be traced to John Wesley’s texts and praxis: it is based upon a reduction of the divisive dogmatic framework, to focus rather on the so-called “fundamental” or “essential doctrines” shared by different traditions.<sup>29</sup> The preface of the Italian edition of Wesley’s sermons, with its reference to the “fundamental truths,” may echo this view. Moreover, in the lines which follow, not only the Protestant Churches but the entire Christianity is taken into consideration, and a concept complementary to that of “fundamental truths” emerges: that of “secondary matters,” namely “non-essential” (or “indifferent”) doctrines (*adiaphora*). This point of view perfectly coheres with that of the sermon *Catholic Spirit* – included, not by chance, in this anthology –, where Wesley invited his audience to put aside the differences about the “opinions” (this is another synonym of “non-essential doctrines,” for Wesley),<sup>30</sup> rather focusing on the essential doctrines (cf. *Catholic Spirit*, II.2, III.1).

All of this is also consonant with the opening lines of the programmatic text *The Character of a Methodist* (1742), where Wesley explained that “the *distinguishing marks* of a Methodist are not his *opinions* of any sort”: he/she believes in a series of essential doctrines, such as the centrality of the Scriptures or the divinity of Christ; but “as to all opinions which do not strike at the root of Christianity we [Methodists] ‘think and let think.’”<sup>31</sup> Wesley, in fact, conceived Methodism as a renewal movement within the Church of England, and more generally within the universal Church (Piggott, in his *Breve storia*, also presented it in this way); it was only after Wesley’s death that Methodism became a separate denomination. It is worth considering this *twofold dimension*, which also helps to understand the preface to the Italian edition of the sermons: on the one hand, the Methodist specificity, which however, more than being a real separate “theology,” is constituted by a series of “theological emphases”<sup>32</sup> (such as that on *sanctification/perfection*); on the other hand, the “ecumenical” openness, the non-dogmatic stance. They are in *dialectical* relationship.

---

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Piggott, *Breve storia*, 11-7.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. his above-mentioned letter of November 1864, in *Missionary Notices*, 1864, 193-6: 194.

<sup>28</sup> *Ventidue sermoni*, 3. ET is mine.

<sup>29</sup> Cf. A. Annese, “‘With open arms the world embrace’”. Motivi ‘ecumenici’ in John Wesley: per un confronto con Erasmo da Rotterdam,” in Annese, ed., *Ecumenismo e cattolicità delle Chiese*, 101-17.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. T.A. Campbell, “The Shape of Wesleyan Thought: The Question of John Wesley’s ‘Essential’ Christian Doctrines,” *The Asbury Theological Journal*, 59/1-2 (2004): 27-48; J.A. Newton, “The Ecumenical Wesley,” *The Ecumenical Review*, 24/2 (1972): 160-75.

<sup>31</sup> J. Wesley, *The Character of a Methodist*, § 1, in *The Methodist Societies: History, Nature, and Design*, ed. R.E. Davies, vol. 9 of *The Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley* [hereafter: *Works*] (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984-), 33-4.

<sup>32</sup> R. Gribben, “‘Let us look one another in the eye’”. Una panoramica dei dialoghi che coinvolgono il Consiglio

After the editor's preface (*Avvertenza*), the Italian anthology contains a preface by Wesley himself, a translation of the one he included in his collection *Sermons on Several Occasions* (three volumes published between 1746 and 1750, then a fourth in 1760, for a total of forty-four sermons), written in 1745-1746. The Methodist Churches consider this collection as part of their "doctrinal standards" (along with Wesley's *Explanatory Notes upon the New Testament*, 1755),<sup>33</sup> basing on a recommendation by Wesley himself. In the "Model Deed" of 1763, he invited the Methodist preachers to "preach no other doctrine than is contained in Mr. W[esley]'s *Notes upon the New Testament* and four Vol[ume]s of Sermons."<sup>34</sup> In his preface to the *Sermons*, Wesley also explains that the collection includes, one way or another, all the doctrines on which he has spoken in public and which are "the essentials of true religion" (§ 1).<sup>35</sup> Wesley then deals with the issue of language, showing how he avoided difficult terminology and oratorical dress, and abstained from "philosophical speculations," preferring clarity: "I design plain truth for plain people" (§ 3). He recalls his desire to focus on the Bible, almost forgetting any other source: here we can read his well-known invocation to God "Let me be *homo unius libri*" (§ 5). Thus, Wesley continues, "in the following sermons [...] I have endeavoured to describe the true, the scriptural, experimental religion" (§ 6), inviting the readers to avoid both "formality," i.e. "mere outside religion which has almost driven heart-religion out of the world," and the risk of making void the law through faith (cf. Rom 3:31), forgetting "the faith which worketh by love [Gal 5:6]" (*ibid.*). Here Wesley condenses (and, consequently, Piggott presents to the Italian readers) some of the main Wesleyan theological concepts, such as *heart-religion*, which witnesses the Pietist influence on him, and the "faith which worketh by love," where Wesley – though maintaining the classical Protestant doctrine of salvation by faith alone – stresses the importance of good works, in the sense of a *faith at work* (against Antinomianism).

Wesley's preface could be a good summary of the whole collection of sermons, which here is impossible to examine in detail. I mention the first sermon, *Salvazione per la fede* (*Salvation by Faith*), on Eph 2:8. It was preached at the University of Oxford on June 11, 1738, and this was the first time that Wesley preached after his Aldersgate experience (May 24): significantly, Wesley decided to open the collection with this sermon. It displays his "new" understanding of justification, now described in "Lutheran" terms – though mediated by the *Book of Homilies* of the Church of England (cf. *Salvation*, III,8).<sup>36</sup>

The collection includes the above-mentioned *La via che mena al Regno* (*The Way to the Kingdom*), on Mark 1:15. Here Wesley defines "the nature of true religion," which – as he writes – does not consist "in any outward thing, such as forms or ceremonies," neither in "outward actions," "orthodoxy or right opinions." Rather, it lies in the deeper, hidden dimension of the heart, and consists

---

metodista mondiale," in Annese, ed., *Ecumenismo e cattolicità delle Chiese*, 64-75: 65; cf. J.E. Vickers, "Wesley's theological emphases," in R.L. Maddox, J.E. Vickers (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to John Wesley* (Cambridge – New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 190-206.

<sup>33</sup> American Methodism (and the Churches derived from it) also includes the *Articles of Religion*.

<sup>34</sup> The "Model Deed" is in the so-called "Large" *Minutes* of 1763, § 67, in *The Methodist Societies. The Minutes of Conference*, ed. H.D. Rack, in *Works*, 10:868-70 (quotation is from 869-70). For further information on the debate about number and constituents of the *standard sermons* (since, during Wesley's life, different editions of sermons were released), see E.H. Sugden, ed., *Wesley's Standard Sermons*, 2 vols. (London: Epworth Press, 1951<sup>3</sup> [1921]), 1:13-26 and 2:331-40; R.E. Davies, N.B. Harmon, "Doctrinal Standards of Methodism," in Harmon, ed., *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 1:698-703.

<sup>35</sup> For the sake of brevity, here I quote directly the original English text, without reporting the Italian translation. See J. Wesley, *Sermons I*, ed. A.C. Outler, in *Works*, 1:103-7. See this edition also for the text of the other sermons I will quote.

<sup>36</sup> See also Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, e.g. 16, 105, 107, 119, 121-33.

in what Paul summarizes as “righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost [cf. Rom 14:17]” (I,1-7). The way to the Kingdom is faith, which Wesley conceives not as a mere intellectual assent to the Scriptural doctrines, but as a “sure trust” in salvation obtained thanks to Christ’s sacrifice, in particular as a trust in (and perception of) one’s *own* salvation (in line with the Revival’s emphasis on the personal dimension) (cf. II,10).

Some sermons focus on specific Wesleyan themes, such as sanctification and its culmination, what Wesley called *Christian perfection*:<sup>37</sup> for example, the 1733 sermon *La Circoncisione del cuore* (*The Circumcision of the Heart*), on Rom 2:29. Another key issue is the *new birth*: the related sermon (It. trans. *La nuova nascita*) addresses John 3:7. Here Wesley starts from the exegesis of Gen 1 and 3, viz. the narrative of the creation of man and woman *after the image of God* and of the original sin. In consequence of sin, humankind lost the status of “image,” whence the need to “be born again” (John 3:7). The new birth, Wesley explains, is a great change that God works in the human soul to free it from sin (cf. II,5), so it is different from justification (which rather concerns *forgiving* sins, cf. § 1). Moreover, it is not the same with baptism (IV,1), neither with sanctification (IV,3); it is “the gate” of sanctification, “the entrance into it,” which starts a gradual process of growth and enhancement.

These sermons illustrated some of the main theological themes of Protestantism, Methodism, and Revivalism. The 1868 anthology, which introduced them to the Italian readers for the first time, then constitutes a pivotal text in the history of Methodism in Italy, both for the diffusion of the doctrines of this denomination (and its initiator) and for the training of the ecclesiastical personnel (this volume, like Piggott’s *Breve storia*, was for decades among the texts which the candidates for ministry in Italy had to study).

5. Very briefly, I would like to show how these strategies continued in the years that followed, up to about 1890. As for the Wesleyan Church, a very important publication was *John Wesley* by Matthieu Lelièvre, translated by the Wesleyan minister Francesco Sciarelli in 1877.<sup>38</sup> This volume had a good diffusion and a certain impact, not only in Protestant circles. It described Wesley’s life, the main Methodist doctrines and the ecclesiastical organization. It also reflected upon Methodism as a form not only of revival, but even of moral and religious “revolution” or reform that, in England, had complemented the political one.<sup>39</sup> For what concerns the reception of ancient Christian literature, here it is sufficient to mention the magazine *La Civiltà Evangelica* (1874-1902), which dedicated several series of articles to it, mainly written by Thomas W.S. Jones (e.g. *Il Cristo degli Evangelisti*, which Jones later republished separately, in three volumes, 1877-1880) and Francesco Sciarelli. Yet, this journal contained few articles about Methodist history and doctrines.

The Methodist Episcopal mission developed similar editorial strategies. This American mission reached Italy in 1871, with Rev. Leroy Monroe Vernon (1838-1896),<sup>40</sup> and had its “denominational turn” in 1874, when its first Italian District Conference was gathered in Bologna (on

---

<sup>37</sup> On these issues, see R.L. Maddox, *Responsible Grace. John Wesley’s Practical Theology* (Nashville [TN]: Kingswood, 1994), 176-91; Outler, ed., *John Wesley*, 9-10, 30-2.

<sup>38</sup> M. Lelièvre, *Giovanni Wesley. Sua vita e sua opera*, It. trans. by F. Sciarelli (Padua: Prosperini, 1877); or. ed. *John Wesley: sa vie et son oeuvre* (Paris: Librairie Évangélique, 1868).

<sup>39</sup> “Grande rivoluzione [...] fu quella, che, completando il rivolgimento politico del secolo precedente, ha creato l’Inghilterra moderna, quella nazione, che dà al mondo l’esempio della fecondità delle istituzioni [*sic*] liberali appoggiate sull’Evangelo” (*ibid.*, 343-4).

<sup>40</sup> See R. Kissack, “Vernon, M. Leroy,” in *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 2:2419.



September 10). In a sense, this gave birth to the “Methodist Episcopal Church of Italy.”<sup>41</sup> In 1881 the Italian mission was established as an autonomous Annual Conference (though remaining linked with the American parent Church). During the mid-eighties, new plans for the union of the Italian Protestant Churches were made (especially in 1884), but they failed. The Episcopal Methodists, as the Wesleyans (and other Churches), wanted to maintain a Methodist denominational identity.<sup>42</sup> This was probably even more evident with Vernon’s successor as Superintendent, William Burt (1852-1936).<sup>43</sup> He arrived in Italy in 1886, initially to cooperate with Vernon; in 1888, Vernon was forced to resign, and Burt was entrusted with the reorganization of the Italian mission, which he superintended from 1889 to 1904. Under the pragmatic and effective direction of Burt, Italian Episcopal Methodism experienced its period of greatest expansion: he opened prestigious schools, churches, a Theological Faculty (1889), a printing/publishing press (“La Speranza”). To understand how Burt insisted on denominational identity, it is sufficient to quote the following sentence: “We had no reason to be in Italy if not in our individuality as the Methodist Episcopal Church.”<sup>44</sup>

The editorial strategies fit with this perspective. It should be noted that the Episcopal Methodists, like the Wesleyans, considered publications to be pivotal *from the beginning* of their activity, even before the establishment of the Church in 1874. In the 1873 *Annual Report*, Vernon made a long account of what was, *de facto*, the first real year of activity.<sup>45</sup> In a paragraph titled *Publications*, he mentioned the *Twenty-five Articles of Religion*, a catechism and a compendium of theology.<sup>46</sup> Actually, it is not clear what had already been published in 1873, since Vernon stated that “part” of them was, and since we have evidence for these publications only in the years which followed. The *Articles*, for example, appeared in the 1879 *Costituzioni* (the Italian version of the *Book of Discipline*) and then in other volumes.<sup>47</sup> Vernon’s report, however, informs us about the plans and intentions of his Church: unlike the Wesleyans, the Episcopal Methodists did not choose, as their first publications, texts about the history of Methodism or sermons by Wesley (perhaps also to avoid overlapping), but more ecclesiastically and doctrinally characterized texts.

---

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Chiarini, *Storia delle Chiese metodiste*, 66.

<sup>42</sup> On these projects see V. Vinay, *Storia dei valdesi. III. Dal movimento evangelico italiano al movimento ecumenico (1848-1978)* (Turin: Claudiana, 1980), 311-5; Chiarini, *Storia delle Chiese metodiste*, 77-80. Cf. Vernon’s comments in *Sixty-Seventh Annual Report of the Missionary Society of the Methodist Episcopal Church, For the Year 1885* (New York: MEC, 1886), 195-6 (hereafter I will cite these *Annual Reports* as “MSAR,” followed by the year to which the Report refers). The following statement by Piggott (from a letter of February 16, 1885) is also interesting: “I do not think it is desirable that there should be only one Protestant Church in Italy. It is well, in my opinion, that we as Methodists should exist, provided we do really bring into the field our Methodist traditions” (Piggott, Durley, *Life and Letters*, 134).

<sup>43</sup> Cf. E.T. Clark, “Burt, William”, in *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 1:362.

<sup>44</sup> MSAR 1897, 96 (Burt at the 1897 Conference).

<sup>45</sup> MSAR 1873, 130: “The active, aggressive work of the Italian Mission commenced with the beginning of 1873.”

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 134: “We have translated into Italian the following materials, part of which has already been published, namely, our ‘Articles of Religion;’ Dr. B. Hawley’s ‘Manual of Instruction for Classes of Baptized Children [New York, 1865];’ and the ‘Theological Compend,’ by Rev. Amos Binney [first ed. New York, 1840].”

<sup>47</sup> *Costituzioni della Chiesa Metodista Episcopale Italiana* (Rome: Tip. Chiera, 1879); *Dottrine e disciplina della Chiesa metodista episcopale. 1888. Coll’Appendice* (Florence: Barbera, 1889), and subsequent editions; see also Sulzberger’s commented edition, cited below, n. 51. I was not able to find any Italian edition of Hawley’s manual; as for the compendium of theology, which is A. Binney, *A Theological Compend: Containing a System of Divinity, or a Brief View of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity* (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1840), augm. ed. *Binney’s Theological Compend Improved. Containing a Synopsis of the Evidences, Doctrines, Morals, and Institutions of Christianity*, ed. by A. Binney and D. Steele (New York: Nelson & Phillips, 1875), an Italian ed. was published in 1882: *Compendio di Teologia. Compilato dai Reverendi Amos Binney e Daniele Steele D.D., tradotto dal Dottor Silvio Stazi* (Milan: Tip. F. Poncelletti, 1882).

The 1880s were among the most intellectually fruitful years for Italian Episcopal Methodism, because of the production of valuable scholars such as Pietro Tagliatela, Enrico Caporali and Teofilo Gay.<sup>48</sup> Also important was the role of the journal *La Fiaccola* (1878-80, 1882-88), which – especially in 1882-83 – published articles exploring historico-philosophical and historico-theological issues. Among these was a long series by Caporali (*Storia filosofica della teologia protestante fedele ed infedele*) that retraced the history of Protestant theology, also including many references to early Christianity; here and in other articles, Caporali extensively described the specificity of Methodism. Moreover, it was in *La Fiaccola* that, in 1885, appeared one of the first Italian translations, from Greek, of the *Didache*, an early Christian text discovered by Philotheos Bryennios in 1873 and published in 1883.<sup>49</sup> A significant feature, the use of the *argumentum patristicum* – as Wesley did – to refute Roman Church doctrines (e.g. transubstantiation), was instrumental in a text by Teofilo Gay, *Arsenale antipapale* (1882).<sup>50</sup> Gay also published, in *La Fiaccola*, some articles about history and doctrines of Episcopal Methodism. Particularly notable is a volume published in 1885: the translation, by Rev. Domenico Polsinelli, of a written work by the Swiss Episcopal Methodist theologian Arnold Sulzberger (1832-1907), which reported and commented on the *Articles of Religion* that Wesley established in 1784 as the doctrinal basis of American Methodism, and analyzed the four Methodist “distinctive doctrines” (universal redemption, new birth, assurance of salvation, Christian perfection).<sup>51</sup> It is difficult to exaggerate the importance of this volume, which probably constitutes the first, true *systematic* discussion, within Italian Methodism, of the Methodist theological doctrines. Polsinelli, in fact, did not limit himself to translating Sulzberger’s commentary, but added his own (often very detailed) comments. The former Dominican monk Polsinelli shows here a solid theological competence.

Under Burt’s management, as mentioned above, further emphasis was placed on denominational identity, also through the publication of various volumes on the history, theology, and organization of Methodism. I will mention just a few key examples. Very significant was the publication of the Church’s *Book of Discipline (Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church)*, which covered all the doctrinal and organizational issues.<sup>52</sup> A first translation was printed already in 1879,<sup>53</sup> but Burt, about ten years later, promoted a new edition, having noticed that the *Discipline* was too little distributed and known.<sup>54</sup> Burt’s goal was that all members of the Church,

<sup>48</sup> For further details see Annese, *Tra Riforma e patristica*, chap. 3.

<sup>49</sup> “Dottrina (*Didachè*) dei dodici Apostoli,” ed. R. Wigley, *La Fiaccola*, 7 (1885), issues of September 5, 19, and 26, October 10 and 24.

<sup>50</sup> T. Gay, *Arsenale antipapale, ossia Dizionario delle eresie, imposture e idolatrie della Chiesa romana* (Florence: Claudiana, 1882 [2nd ed. 1897]).

<sup>51</sup> A. Sulzberger [misprinted as “Sulzberger”], *Spiegazione degli articoli di fede e dottrine principali della Chiesa metodista*, It. trans. by D. Polsinelli (Naples: Tip. de Angelis, 1885); or. ed. *Erklärung der Glaubensartikel und Hauptlehren der Methodistenkirche* [sometimes cited as *Glaubensbekenntnis der Methodistenkirche*] (Bremen, n.d. [but 1879 or 1880]). About A. Sulzberger see Ch. Raedel, *Methodistische Theologie im 19. Jahrhundert. Der deutschsprachige Zweig der Bischöflichen Methodistenkirche* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2004), 222-7.

<sup>52</sup> A first (very brief) version of the *Discipline* was printed in the United States as early as 1785, shortly after the birth of the Methodist Episcopal Church. See R. Emory, *History of the Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (1843), revised ed. by W.P. Strickland (New York: Carlton & Porter, 1857); N.B. Harmon, “Discipline, The Book of,” in *The Encyclopedia of World Methodism*, 1:686-8.

<sup>53</sup> *Costituzioni della Chiesa*. Probably, it was translated from the 1876 American edition: *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Methodist Episcopal Church* (Nelson & Phillips: Cincinnati – New York, 1876).

<sup>54</sup> *Dottrine e disciplina [...] 1888* (trans. from the American 1888 edition). Cf. *Minute dell’ottava sessione della Conferenza Annuale italiana della Chiesa metodista episcopale. Tenuta a Milano, 2-6 Maggio 1889* (Florence: Barbera, 1889), 13.

pastors and laypeople, knew the Methodist doctrines, articles of faith, organization, and discipline. He actually managed to spread the *Discipline* quite widely.<sup>55</sup> Lastly, it is to be recalled that, during Burt's superintendence, the Episcopal Methodists published Italian translations of Wesley's texts, as the Wesleyans had done with the sermons. In 1889 and 1890 the translations of two pivotal texts were printed, *The Character of a Methodist* (1742) and *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection* (in the 1766 edition), respectively.<sup>56</sup> Christian perfection has always been one of the most characteristic but also controversial doctrines of Wesley and Methodism: it is significant that it was decided to directly present it to the Italian readers. Lelièvre's and Sulzberger's texts had already dealt with this subject: but now, for the first time the reader was being introduced to Wesley's own words. He had written *Plain Account* to respond to the criticism of inconsistency that had been levelled at him regarding his statements on Christian perfection. This work – which had various editions, with some modifications – is a collection of writings, in chronological order. Here Wesley's objective was to give “a plain and simple account” of the manner wherein he “received” and taught the doctrine of perfection, through the decades.<sup>57</sup> As for *The Character*, already mentioned above (§ 4), it is sufficient here to restate its programmatic value, with its emphasis on the fact that Methodists “refuse to be distinguished from other men, by any but the common principles of Christianity,” “the common, fundamental principles of Christianity” (§ 17). These are the “marks” of a Methodist, a person who wants to walk “as Christ also walked” (*ibid.*).

By 1890, it had become clear that the “dream” of a unified Italian Reformation, which would complement the Risorgimento “revolution,” was unfeasible. The Italian Methodist Churches, however, tried to propagate the doctrines of Wesley and the Evangelical Revival. The publications of nineteenth-century Italian Methodism certainly devoted more space to Wesley than to the Magisterial Reformation, on which something (but not much) appeared mostly on the occasion of the Lutheran centenary of 1883. Caporali, in his *Storia filosofica*, dealt in depth with “classical” Protestant theology, though sometimes with a critical stance, arguing for the “superiority” of Methodism and its Arminian theology of grace. During the following decades, though, the Italian Methodists' attention for Wesley and for Methodist theology seems to have progressively, slowly, decreased; something similar happened as for their relationship with Patristics. The “socio-political” perspective, rather than the historico-theological, became the privileged one (especially after the Second World War). One cannot help but reflect on the fact that, after the *Sermons* (1868), *Character* (1889, second edition 1901), and *Perfection* (1890), it was necessary to wait almost one hundred years for a new Italian translation of a text by Wesley to appear.<sup>58</sup>

---

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Burt's report in MSAR 1889, 246.

<sup>56</sup> G. [sic] Wesley, *Il Carattere d'un Metodista* (Florence: Barbera, 1889) (a second ed. was also released: *Il Carattere del Metodista. Seconda edizione italiana* [Rome: La Speranza, 1901]); and G. [sic] Wesley, *La perfezione cristiana*, ed. E. Stackpole (Florence: Barbera, 1890).

<sup>57</sup> See J. Wesley, *A Plain Account on Christian Perfection*, § 27, in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Th. Jackson, 14 vols. (London: J. Mason, 1829-1831), 11:443.

<sup>58</sup> It is the sermon *Christian Perfection* (1741), in G. Rinaldi, *John Wesley: la perfezione cristiana. Con la traduzione inedita del sermone XXXV* (Velletri: Ecumene Quaderni, 1989), 41-59. Subsequently: J. Wesley, *Il Sermone sul monte. Esposizione e commento dei tredici discorsi di John Wesley*, ed. F. Toppi (Rome: ADI-Media, 2001) (= *Sermons* 21-33, “Upon Our Lord's Sermon on the Mount (I-XIII)”; J. Wesley, *La perfezione cristiana*, ed. M. Rubboli (Chieti: GBU – Turin: Claudiana, 2003) (re-edition of the 1890 translation, with few modifications); J. Wesley, *La perfezione dell'amore. Sermoni*, ed. F. Cavazzutti Rossi (Turin: Claudiana, 2009) (an anthology of twenty sermons, eight of which already present in *Ventidue sermoni*, 1868). Small excerpts of some works by Wesley are also included in certain general anthologies.

Andrea Annese, PhD  
Department of History, Cultures, Religions  
Sapienza University of Rome