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Multilingualism and Interculture in the Repertoire Proposed in Hymnals from 2000 to Today: A Study on Italian Protestant Churches

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Abstract: In the last twenty years the Baptist, Methodist, and Waldensian churches in Italy have experienced an important season of migrations, mainly from South America, South-east Asia, and West Africa. This has led to a problem of sharing and mutual influence on the liturgical and musical levels for Italian churches that they had never experienced before. This article intends to study the editorial proposals of hymnbooks published by the Baptist, Methodist, and Waldensian churches in Italy. How many and which hymnals have been published from an intercultural point of view? Are the proposed repertoires transcultural? How many and which languages have been used in the publications? These three Protestant denominations have used different models for migrant churches. Another important aspect is the translation of the hymns: what language is used, and how certain words, images and theological ideas are made. The article, also using the methods of ethnographic field research, will be enriched by graphs which will show, for each denomination, which hymnographic repertoires were preferred and which vehicular languages were most used (and if this happened).

Keywords: congregational music studies; multilingualism; church music; Italian Protestantism



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1. Introduction

The reality of the churches of historic Protestantism in Italy is small from an absolute numerical point of view, but large in terms of historical and social impact for the nation. The Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, or FCEI, was founded in 1967 and recognizes the Lutherans, Waldensians (reformed), Methodists, Baptists, Salvation Army, and Apostolic Church as belonging to “historical Protestantism”. According to ISTAT and IDOS data from 2023, in Italy there are 58,850,000 residents, of which 5,020,000 are foreigners (i.e., 8.53% are Italian citizens) (IDOS is a center on migration studies in Italy). There are 366,000 Italian citizens who are Protestants, of which only 61,000 belong to the historical denominations; therefore, Protestants in Italy represent 0.68% of Italian citizens, of which only 16.67% are affiliated with historical denominations (Dossier 2023). Therefore, in absolute terms, the Italian citizens who are part of the FCEI churches represent 0.12% of the entire Italian population (data 2023 available on the CESNUR website) (see Tables 1–3).

If foreign citizens resident in Italy are also included in the total, the numbers change quite a bit. In fact, of the just over 5 million foreigners, only 214,000 are Protestants. Most of these, however, are part of evangelical churches; furthermore, due to the phenomenon of so-called “denominational fluidity”, many who were part of a historic church in their country of origin today in Italy participate in the life of churches of a Pentecostal, charismatic, or non-denominational nature. Of these 214,000, approximately 32,000 are part of FCEI churches. Therefore, taking into account the small number examined, it is interesting to note the multifaceted and dynamic presence not only of the religious life of these communities compared to the Catholic majority, but also the numerous social, welfare, and political initiatives of these churches (see Tables 4 and 5). Among these initiatives it is

useful to remember here the activation of the Mediterranean Hope project by the FCEI (a humanitarian monitoring and reception project for migrants, with offices in Lampedusa, Scicli, Rosarno, Lebanon, and Bosnia); the refugees and migrants program for integration processes in collaboration with the Ministry of the Interior of the Italian Republic; the national counter for the laicity of the public school; hospitality by local churches to migrants from various African, Middle-eastern and eastern-European countries; the activation of psychological listening centers and counseling; social activities against gender violence; support centers for employment; and other cultural activities such as libraries, cultural centers, and associations.

Table 1. Population of Italy.

Population	Percentage
Italians	97%
Foreigners	3%

Table 2. Religions in Italy.

Religion	Percentage
Catholics	80%
Minorities	4%
Atheists and agnostics	16%

Table 3. Religious minorities.

Religion	Percentage
Jews	2%
Orthodox	19%
Protestants	16%
Jehovah's Witnesses	18%
Mormons	1%
Muslims	25%
Others	19%

Table 4. Italian Protestants.

Protestant Churches	Percentage
Historical Protestant churches	17%
Other Protestants and evangelicals	83%

Table 5. Foreign Protestants.

Protestant Churches	Percentage
Historical Protestant churches	15%
Other Protestants and evangelicals	85%

This essay aims to study the practices of multilingualism and plurilingualism in Baptist, Methodist, and Waldensian congregations that have decided to undertake journeys of encounter with brothers and sisters who come from other parts of the planet, through publication, translation, and use of various hymns, songs, and hymnbooks.

For ease of study, we borrow some considerations made by the Italian scholars Paolo Naso and Alessia Passarelli, with some of my considerations and modifications based on ethnographic studies in the field (Naso et al. 2014). We divide local churches into five different categories: monocultural churches, welcoming churches, international churches, intercultural churches, and ethnic churches.

The autochthonous monocultural churches are those wholly or largely composed of Italians. Worship, exclusively in Italian with a traditional liturgy, generally does not provide freedom of expression in other languages in songs and prayers. The community, therefore, in its self-awareness, continues to perceive itself as Italian.

Welcoming (or low-integration) churches are those which, despite having welcomed a significant number of migrants, have not felt the need to reorganize their community life. They are churches where worship generally takes place in Italian and with a traditional liturgical approach, in which, however, at least sometimes, some space for expression is provided, such as songs and prayers, in other languages.

International churches are those that are established on a linguistic basis. Typically Anglophone, Francophone, or Spanish-speaking they end up welcoming members from different states. Worship takes place by enhancing and intertwining different theological and spiritual traditions. The vehicular language is also the means through which shared songs and prayers are practiced.

Intercultural churches are those which, having acknowledged the relevance of the migrant component both on a quantitative level and on the relevance of the culture of which it is the bearer, have reorganized community life, the methods of carrying out worship, and the strategies of presence in the territory in which they operate. These churches include Italians and other national groups. The intercultural dimension is determined by the effort to go beyond the dialectic of simple plurality of origin (i.e., multiculturalism) to build new and shared languages that are capable of generating a renewal in terms of identity and forms of organization of congregational life.

Monocultural ethnic churches have certain characteristics: they are composed of members from a single nation or region; for worship and activities they predominantly use the native language or, in some cases, the colonial one (never or almost never Italian); the activities are oriented towards safeguarding the cultural traditions of origin and maintaining them, as well as ecclesiological and theological lines; and they are critical of and reactionary to the lifestyles of the host society and the churches that are part of it, even if they are of the same denomination.

2. The Hymnals of Baptist, Methodist, and Waldensian Churches from 2000 Onwards: Conservative Reactions and Liberal Impulses

2.1. *Innario Cristiano*, Claudiana, 2000

This *Innario Cristiano* is not published by a particular Church; it is the Hymnal of all the Churches of Italy that participated in the National Evangelical Congress, held in Rome in 1920. In highlighting this fact, the importance of which escapes no one, we hope that the singing of the same hymns contributes to an ever-increasing brotherhood of Italian Evangelicals. And may many souls, even outside the sphere of our Churches, find in this Hymnal the expression of their religious feelings and the means of reviving their Christian piety!

(Ernesto [Comba et al. 1922](#))

The preface to the original edition of the Hymnal of the historic Protestant churches in Italy (1922) is useful in understanding what the intent was, one hundred years ago, to create a single hymnbook for the use of the Baptist, Methodist, and Waldensian churches in Italy, in the aftermath of the Risorgimento and at the dawn of the twenty years of fascism. Over the course of these years, the FCEI published two other editions of the Hymnal, one in 1969 and the last in 2000. Given the topic of our essay, we will deal with the latter, also due to the Italian migratory flows that began, in a more structured and massive way, in the 1990s.

The Hymnal contains 354 hymns, almost all of which belong to historical repertoires (Table 6).

Despite youth pushes in the churches, in the historical denominations, there are no musical groups that propose new arrangements and executions of the Protestant repertoire. Another important fact, however, is the absence of superordinate regulations by

churches for musicians, choirs, singers, or leaders; everything is based on the freedom of local congregations.

Table 6. Repertoires present (in absolute numbers and percentages).

Repertoires	Number of Hymns	Percentage
Pre-reformed melodies	17	4.81%
16th century chorales	19	5.37%
Huguenot and Scottish psalms	49	13.85%
Pietist hymns	12	3.39%
European hymns between the 17th and 19th centuries	99	27.97%
Hymns and songs of the Anglo-Saxon Revival and the Franco-Swiss Reveil	103	29.10%
African-American Spiritual	1	0.29%
Hymns of the Italian Risorgimento	8	2.26%
Hymns of the European twentieth century	7	1.98%
Hymns of the Italian twentieth century	23	6.50%
Hymns and songs of the ecumenical movement	8	2.26%
Christian pop songs	0	0%
Folk tunes	5	1.42%
Waldensian hymns	3	0.85%

Another important consideration is that the Italian language does not allow neutral terms or, at least, terms that are inclusive of the male and female genders; this has led in recent years to heated debates in churches on how to use inclusive language (to delve deeper into this theme, we recommend reading the Italian-language research of E. Green and L. Tomassone). In this hymnbook, only one hymn (n. 255) has gender inclusive language (in addition to the baptismal and confirmation hymns).

In addition to these problems, the language used also does not help. In fact, only one hymn is in a non-Italian language, n. 354, i.e., *Le Serment de Sibaud*, which has both the text in Italian and the text in French, as it is an integral part of the Waldensian tradition. The Waldensian Church, and, consequently, the Waldensian people have had French as their vehicular language for centuries. The Waldensian Valleys, north-west of the current Italian Republic, are located on the border with France; furthermore, the Waldensians have always had close ties both with the southern regions of France and with the French-speaking Swiss cantons, in particular with the reformed Geneva. It was only from 1848, the year of recognition of the civil and political rights of the Waldensians by the King of Italy, that the Waldensian Church started to introduce, step-by-step, the use of Italian as the principal language of worship and church life. Nowadays, this hymnal is still the most used in the Methodist and Waldensian churches, which means little involvement for the foreign brothers and sisters who are part of the Italian churches.

2.2. *Cantate al Signore, Claudiana, 2000*

At the same time as the publication of the official hymnbook of the FCEI, an ad hoc commission, Gruppo Musica Evangelica (the Evangelical Music Group), gave rise to an important but unfortunate experiment in collecting songs and hymns for use by churches which looked more closely at the ecumenical movement and the experiences of the World Council of Churches (*Cantate al Signore* 2000).

From the introduction, some salient points of the compositional and propositional ratio of the hymnbook can be deduced: the dignity and duration of the group's work, the highlighting of the intent to add to and not replace the hymn repertoire of the local communities, and the heterogeneous scope of the repertoire proposed (hymns from different regions of the world), which is able to enter into dialogue with new generations. Given the authoritative significance of the *Innario Cristiano* for Italian Protestants on the one hand, and the many proposals for new hymnals on the other—proposals that include Baptist collec-

tions, children’s collections, youth movement music, and books of rediscovered historical repertoire—hymnal commission president Eugenio Rivoir wanted to underline both the seriousness of the commission’s work in terms of the years spent collecting and discussing rediscovered material, and the dignity of their work at meetings, conferences, and national study groups. Another important priority was to reassure those who loved the 2000 edition of the *Innario Cristiano* and worried about the possibility of historical and consolidated repertoire being replaced by new songs and other cultural influences, including those of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal movements and overseas Baptist movements. In reality, the admirable work undertaken for this hymnbook is evidenced by the international scope that has been given to it, as we find songs from the tradition of the ecumenical movement, hymns from North Europe, and songs from the various states of Latin America, as well as the many proposals from the Eastern churches, the African ones, and also new proposals from Italian composers. Along with the intent to make music from various geographical areas available to the churches, local congregations also had to find a way to enter into dialogue among themselves and with communities and church members who came from other parts of the world. This can be seen from Table 7:

Table 7. Hymns by country of origin.

Countries of Origin	Number of Hymns
Argentina	4
Bolivia	2
Brazil	2
Denmark	1
Ecuador	1
El Salvador	1
France	1
Germany	8
Greece	1
Italy	9
Malawi	1
Nigeria	1
Pakistan	2
Peru	2
Russia	2
South Africa	3
Spain	1
Sweden	4
Switzerland	2
Tanzania	1
Togo	1
Ukraine	2
Uruguay	1
USA	11
Zimbabwe	2
World Council of Churches (WCC)	3
Traditional Hymns (Historical)	7
Jewish melodies	3
Iona Community	4
Taizé Community	7
African-American spiritual	8

In the publication, the musical and rhythmic stylistic features of the proposed songs were respected as much as possible. In this sense, field research would be useful to understand how much the musicians in the churches manage to perform these extra-European repertoires in style.

We observe three major critical issues:

1. The absence of gender-inclusive language. Gender-inclusive language has been considered to be of great importance by the Italian Protestant churches; for many years now, the theological commissions, Synods and Assemblies of the churches have been working on an update of language from an inclusive perspective. For example, official documents are all produced with the use of gender-inclusive language, as are theological treaties and the positions carried out in the ecumenical environment. Music in worship is missing from this discussion, however: in the hymnals, careful use of gender-inclusive language has been absent for many years.
2. The almost total absence of other languages, compared to Italian. In the entire hymnbook we find ninety-two songs with lyrics in Italian, of which two are transliterations from Hebrew and one is a transliteration from the Xhosa language. Six songs instead use a liturgical text, like Gloria, Alleluia, or Kyrie Eleison.
3. The editorial failure of this publication, which was practically not adopted by any local churches, was not only due to traditionalist resistance, but also due to a banal printing error by the publisher: the hymnbook was, in fact, printed with skipped pages, making use of the hymnbook difficult.

2.3. *Let's Sing Together/Cantiamo Insieme*, 2007

The program of the Integration section of the Studies, Dialogue, and Integration Commission (Commissione Studi, Dialogo e Integrazione) was created within the FCEI, called Being Church Together (Essere Chiesa Insieme, ECI), coordinated by Paolo Naso. One of the most important points of discussion and, at times, of friction in the local ECI communities is precisely the music in worship and everything that depends on it: musical instruments, repertoires, languages, and space necessary for movements and dance. One of the most interesting tools is the bilingual hymnal *Let's Sing Together* (Aldridge and Markay 2007), sponsored by the Commission for Multicultural Pastoral Care of the II District of the Waldensian and Methodist Evangelical Churches. In it, there are ninety-three songs from different geographical areas of the world, from different centuries, and different denominational traditions. The importance of this necessary dialogue in international and multiethnic communities is highlighted in the introduction to this hymnal.

The introduction to this volume states its purpose thus:

From the time of the Psalms, singing has been a way to bring together “all the earth”. Many of our congregations are increasingly reflecting the diversity of God’s creation. The idea behind this hymnbook is that when we come together from various backgrounds and cultures to sing our faith, our experience of worship can be even richer. This book is a collection of Christian music from different countries, eras, authors, composers, and experiences of the Christian faith. It is designed as a resource for worship in communities in which Italian and English are the primary languages. At times it will be appropriate for each person to be able to sing in his/her mother language. At other times it may be important to “sing a new song” in a language not our own. (Aldridge and Markay 2007)

The collection consists of ninety hymns and songs and three liturgical texts. The repertoires represented are heterogeneous and inclusive of the different cultures and sensitivities expressed by multicultural and international churches that use English and Italian as vehicular languages (vd. Table 8).

Table 8. Repertoires present (in absolute numbers and percentages).

Repertoires	Number of Hymns	Percentage
Pre-reformed melodies	4	4.45%
16th century chorales	1	1.12%
Huguenot and Scottish psalms	3	3.34%
Pietist hymns	1	1.12%

Table 8. Cont.

Repertoires	Number of Hymns	Percentage
European hymns between the 17th and 19th centuries	13	14.45%
Hymns and songs of the Anglo-Saxon Revival and the Fracon-Swiss Reveil	22	24.45%
African-American Spiritual	6	6.67%
Hymns of the European 20th century	8	8.89%
Hymns and songs of the ecumenical movement	15	16.67%
Christian pop songs	8	8.89%
Songs from African states	7	7.78%
Songs from Latin American states	1	1.12%
Jewish melodies	1	1.12%

The absence of gender-inclusive language is also noticeable in this hymnal.

2.4. E Tutto il Popolo Dica Amen! Canti e Testi per la Liturgia Comunitaria, Claudiana, 2008/2015

The collection *And let all the people say: AMEN! Songs and texts for the community liturgy* features another commission, born from a supra-denominational body different from the FCEI, i.e., from the BMV partnership (Baptists, Methodists, and Waldensians, which has existed since 1979), the BMV Commission for Worship and Liturgy. Ermanno Genre (president of the commission), in his introduction to the collection, identifies in the responsories and antiphons some of the oldest models of congregational liturgical practice in the Christian church. Since the first centuries, in fact, congregations have participated in worship precisely at the time of the responsories. In the Protestant world, this practice, although maintained in the Lutheran liturgy, was suppressed by Calvin and increasingly by the Reformed churches, particularly in Italy, where the clash with Catholicism has always been very strong, from the Risorgimento period onwards (Cignoni 2020).

The present volume [...] is situated in this ancient Christian tradition that many churches have maintained over the centuries, and which others have instead abandoned. The liturgical freedom that distinguishes the evangelical churches in Italy will certainly be able to make good use of these proposals. These are [...] texts that are proposed and never imposed. The renewal of liturgy and worship needs convictions, authentic appropriations, not half-hearted attempts or improvised innovations. The responsories and liturgical material presented in these pages intend to give voice to the community that celebrates worship, helping it to feel truly subject to the celebration. The worship is celebrated by the community that gathers [...], there is a need for chorality, polyphony, harmony, and in view of these objectives it is necessary for the gathered community to participate actively. It is therefore not a question of following fashion, in the sense of thinking that every now and then it is good to change, but of ensuring that the worship we celebrate to praise the Lord and to visibly demonstrate our faith and our belonging to the church, in listening of his word and in the celebration of the Lord's Supper, express a true communion. [...] In every generation there is a need for poets, new songs, new music, new liturgical initiatives to express the praise of the Lord today, with ancient and modern words. (Genre [2008] 2015)

The book is divided into different sections: opening, Psalms, praise and thanksgiving, confession of sin, biblical readings, affirmation of faith, Lord's Supper, collection of offerings, intercessory prayers, and blessing.

The "opening" section is made up of ten readings and seven songs, all of which are in Italian. The section dedicated to the "celebration Psalms" is made up of nine readings and nine songs, all of which are also in Italian. The "praise and thanksgiving" section has four readings and four songs. The "confession of sin" section is made up of eight readings and eight songs, one of which is also in English and two of which use liturgical language (Kyrie Eleison). The section dedicated to biblical readings and preparation for the sermon

is made up of a reading and five songs, one of which uses liturgical language (Hallelujah). For the “Confession of faith” or “Affirmation of faith”, we find two readings and two songs in Italian. For the “Lord’s Supper”, we find six readings and liturgical schemes and seven songs in Italian. The “collection of offerings” is proposed with a single song in Italian. For the “intercession”, we find six readings and six songs, all in Italian. For the conclusion of the worship, eight readings and eleven songs are proposed, of which two use liturgical language (Amen and Hallelujah).

The natural observation is that the songs proposed in the book are all, or almost all, from different parts of the world, originally written in a language other than Italian, or composed specifically for ecumenical gatherings (vd. Table 9). This resulted in the exclusion of all non-Italian-speaking church members from these liturgical and worship proposals.

Table 9. Origin (in absolute numbers and percentages).

Places of Origin	Number of Hymns	Percentage
Italy	8	13.56%
North Europe	10	16.95%
East Europe	3	5.09%
North America	6	10.17%
South America	15	25.43%
Africa	6	10.17%
Iona community	7	11.87%
Taizé community	4	6.78%

2.5. *Celebriamo il Risorto, Claudiana, 2015*

The last example we deal with is the hymnbook created within the union of Italian Baptist churches, *Celebriamo il Risorto/Let’s Celebrate the Risen One*. In the introduction we read:

The objectives of this work are: to collect, on the occasion of the celebrations of 150 years of Baptist presence in Italy, the musical material sung in the Baptist churches of UCEBI [that is, the union of the Italian Baptist churches]; indicate proposals for the renewal and expansion of the musical repertoire of the evangelical churches; finally, propose a repertoire that is the result of the sensitivity and different traditions that animate the worship and testimony in churches. (Lella and Spanu 2014)

In fact, the proposed repertoire is varied: from the Anglo-Saxon Awakening to Christian pop, from the songs of the ecumenical movement to the new Italian proposals. The most relevant thing, however, is the inclusion for a selection of hymns of texts in different languages, at least of the languages used in the international Baptist congregations present in Italy. Of the three hundred and forty hymns in the hymnbook, thirty-one songs are printed to include more than one language. The languages are all vehicular languages for local congregations, except, for obvious reasons, the transliterations of Hebrew and Arabic, inserted with the intent of inclusion and interreligious dialogue (the percentages refer only to songs with multi-language text, vd. Table 10).

The hymnbook names the “Nigerian” language; this error should be corrected as the language of the written text is Igbo.

It is also interesting to consider for which hymns and songs the multilingual texts were provided. Twelve are from South America; five from Africa; five from Europe; four are Jewish melodies; three from North America; and one is by an Italian composer. Of these songs, twelve are published in WCC collections, two in Iona community collections, and two in KEK meeting collections.

The problem encountered is that, despite the intent being to include the international communities present among the congregations forming part of the Baptist Union, the absolute percentage of hymns and songs proposed with multilingual texts is very low: out of three hundred and forty-two songs, only thirty-one present these texts in different

languages. If we then analyze the languages offered, for each language the percentages drop considerably. For example, the largest international communities among the Union of Baptist Churches of Italy are the Spanish-speaking ones. Out of thirty-one total songs, there are only twenty-two lyrics in Spanish. This leads to little interaction during services between Spanish-speaking and Italian-speaking church members.

Table 10. Percentage of languages present.

Languages	Percentage
English	34%
Spanish	30%
French	12%
Portuguese	10%
Nigerian	1%
Shona	1%
Xhosa	3%
Zulu	3%
Transliterated Hebrew	5%
Transliterated Arabic	1%

3. The Problem of Translations

The problem of translations of hymns in the churches of historic Protestantism in Italy is a long-standing one. Since the beginning of the evangelization missions on Italian soil by the Methodist and Baptist missions in the nineteenth century, and the dialogue that immediately characterized Italian Protestantism (between Waldensians, Methodists, Baptists, free churches, and Brethren churches), translations of English and American, German and French hymns have been discussed by the churches. While the branch of the Reformed Church in Italy (the Waldensian Church) has always had (at least since the Synod of Chanforan in 1532) a close link with Geneva and with the German reformed churches, the other denominations were either recently founded (such as the Assemblies of the Brethren, founded by Count Piero Guicciardini and Teodorico Pietrocola Rossetti in the Risorgimento period) or foreign missions (there were two Baptist missions, one English and the other American, and two Methodist missions, one Wesleyan from England and one Episcopal from the USA). The Waldensians, who used both French and Italian as their languages of worship, had a vast production of hymnals of psalms and hymns which were closely linked with Genevan publications. The Methodists and Baptists, however, worked hard on translations from English. This meant that commissions for the preparation of hymnbooks had to work hard to provide Italian churches with the vast hymnodic heritage of international Protestantism. Unfortunately, however, it must be noted that the theological and ecclesiological inclinations of the Protestant churches in Italy have influenced the meanings and texts, modifying, replacing, and manipulating the originals. These translations, which continued from the mid-nineteenth century up to the publications of the Italian hymnals of the twentieth century (up to the 2000 edition), today involve clashes and comparisons between communities that come from other parts of the world (mostly Africa, South America, and the Philippines) who use the original texts, and Italian communities who, for more than a century and a half, have used texts that have very different theological inclinations and meanings, (on the same topic, in detail, [Annarilli 2024](#) is recommended). In the following, three examples of hymns from different historical repertoires are proposed.

3.1. Blessed Assurance

The famous hymn with lyrics by Francis Jane Crosby and music by Phoebe Palmer Knapp needs no introduction (on the importance and success of the production of Fanny Crosby's lyrics, please refer to the essay by [Blumhofer 2006](#)). The original text presents some very clear theological points, which fully reflect not only Methodist doctrine, but

also rhetorical figures typical of awakened texts, for example exhortations to personal conversion, or parenetic phrases for the Christian service; the most used rhetorical figures are synaesthesia (“sweet yoke” or “beloved cross”), synecdoche (“the blood of Christ” to indicate the sacrifice of Christ), and antonomasia (Jesus is the most frequent case: “The Saviour”, “The Redeemer”, “The Lamb”, etc.; but also in other cases as for the Holy Spirit, “the Comforter”, or the Devil, “the Evil”, “the Tempter”, etc.). In Table 11 we provide the original text in the first column (taken from *Songs of Grace and Glory* 1874), the Italian text in the second column (in *Innario Cristiano* 2000, therefore the version still sung in Italy today), and, in the third column, the literal translation into English of the Italian text (the translation is by the author).

Table 11. Blessed Assurance.

Original Lyrics	Italian Translation in <i>Innario Cristiano</i> , 2000	English Translation of Italian Version
<p>1. Blessed assurance, Jesus is mine! Oh, what a foretaste of glory divine! Heir of salvation, purchased of God, Born in His Spirit, washed in His blood.</p> <p><i>This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Saviour all the day long; This is my story, this is my song, Praising my Saviour all the day long.</i></p> <p>2. Fulness of mercy, perfect delight, Visions of rapture burst on my sight; Angels descending, bring from above Echoes of pardon, whispers of love.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i></p> <p>3. Perfect submission, all is at rest; I in my Saviour am happy and blest; Watching and waiting, looking above, Filled with His goodness, lost in His love.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i></p>	<p>1. Lieta certezza: son di Gesù! Quale dolcezza: ho il ciel quaggiù! Già son rinato, redento son, Son riscattato, ho il suo perdon.</p> <p><i>È la mia storia; è la mia fe': Tutta la gloria al Cristo mio Re! È la mia storia; è la mia fe': Tutta la gloria al Cristo mio Re!</i></p> <p>2. Gesù mi guida, ansie non ho; Il mal mi sfida, pur vincerò! Lo Spirto intanto reca dal ciel L'amore santo del puro Agnel.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i></p> <p>3. Il suo volere osserverò, Del Salvatore l'amor godrò! Sempre guardare a Lui lassù, Nel cor serbare la Sua virtù.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i></p>	<p>1. Blessed assurance, I belong to Jesus! What sweetness: I have heaven down here! Already I am reborn, I am redeemed, I am redeemed, I have His forgiveness.</p> <p><i>This is my story; this is my faith: All Glory to Christ my King! This is my story; this is my faith: All Glory to Christ my King!</i></p> <p>2. Jesus guides me, I have no anxieties; Evil challenges me, yet I will win! Meanwhile the Spirit brings from heaven The holy love of the pure Lamb.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i></p> <p>3. I will observe His will, I will enjoy the love of the Savior! Always look to Him above, Keep His virtue in the heart.</p> <p><i>Refrain</i></p>

The first strong divergence between the two texts can be observed starting from the first verse: while in the original text the “assurance” is the awareness that Jesus himself is this blessed assurance that saves us, in the Italian text the same “assurance” is reversed, that is, it is the believer who belongs to Jesus, and not the other way around, as the original literary construction suggests. The rhetorical and literary figures of verses 3 and 4 are much less strong and more of a “reformed flavor”: “heir of salvation”, “purchase of God”, “born of His Spirit”, and “washed in His Blood”, become new birth, redemption, and forgiveness. This softening of the text very often clashes with the spirituality of international congregations, which is less timid and lukewarm than that of Italian churches.

In the refrain a fundamental point of conflict emerges: the centrality of music in worship and in Christian life. While in the original text it is proclaimed that “this is my story, this is my song”, in the Italian version the focus is brought back to “faith”. Singing about the importance of the song itself was not thought to be very relevant to the centralities of the fundamental principles of the Reform. This fact is also clear from the situation of church music in Italian congregations: many churches have no musicians and have to sing a cappella on Sunday, or with the aid of a backing track. This neglect is not conceivable for non-Italian church members, who therefore consider Italian churches colder and less participatory in the Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The meaning of the second stanza, while remaining similar, was modified through a different use of the metaphors and images recalled by the text. In the ultra-Catholic Italy of the nineteenth century, in strong and bloody conflict with the Protestants, the translators could not use references to images close

to Catholic tastes; in order to avoid misunderstandings with their own church members, neophytes, and converts from Catholicism, they avoided images such as angels, raptures, excessive verticalization, and mysticism. The only glaring divergence in the third stanza is seen in the last verse: being lost in love was not accepted, because the Italian churches (especially the Waldensian one) have always remained distant from pietist flavors, for example, putting the focus on the sensitive side of the devotional sphere, or the use of emotional metaphors in the texts, or even underlining the private and emotional aspect of being a believer.

3.2. Let Us Break Bread Together

As regards the repertoire of African-American spirituals, the situation becomes quite particular. In the *Innario Cristiano* of 2000, in fact, as written above, of the three hundred and fifty-four hymns, only one comes from the African-American repertoire, that is, only Let Us Break Bread Together. Not only has the repertoire been almost completely excluded from this hymnbook, but the meaning of the only spiritual present has been heavily modified in language, images and theological expressions. As for Blessed Assurance, Table 12 presents the original text, the Italian text, and the translation of the Italian text.

Table 12. Let us break bread together.

Original Lyrics	Italian Translation in <i>Innario Cristiano</i> , 2000	English Translation of Italian Version
1. Let us break bread together on our knees. <i>When I fall on my knees with my face to the rising sun, O Lord have mercy on me.</i>	1. In preghiera spezziamo il pane insiem. <i>E invocando il Tuo nome volgiamo lo sguardo a te, Signor, pietà di noi.</i>	1. In prayer we break bread together. <i>And invoking your name we turn our gaze to you, O Lord, have mercy on us.</i>
2. Let us drink wine together on our knees. <i>Refrain</i>	2. In preghiera beviamo il vino insiem. <i>Refrain</i>	2. In prayer we drink wine together. <i>Refrain</i>
3. Let us praise God together on our knees. <i>Refrain</i>	3. In preghiera lodiamo Iddio insiem. <i>Refrain</i>	3. In prayer we praise God together. <i>Refrain</i>

As regards this translation, it is clear that the main meaning of the hymn dedicated to the Lord's Supper is respected; however, there are two main points of divergence that we recognize: 1. as regards the three verses, the reference to being in a kneeling position before the Lord; 2. as regards the refrain, the singular subject disappears, to make room for the plural "we". For the first point, the reason for the divergence between the original text and the translated text should be referred to the theological context in which the commission moved when it worked on this hymnal: an environment theologically very close to the European reformed world, mainly to the ideas of Karl Barth, critical of pietism and the peculiarities that derive from it, for example, the excessive underlining of the emotionality of faith and the emphasis on the sensitive side of the single faithful (cfr. [Olson and Winn 2015](#)). Reference to the states of prayer, devotion, kneeling, rapture, and adoration is almost completely absent in the hymns and songs proposed. For the second point, however, the motivation is linked to the theological and ecclesiological desire to place the focus on the "we" of the community and never on the "I" of the individual; this too is probably due to the clear desire to stay away from pietist and awakened references. The Waldensian point of view (by far the majority among the Italian Protestant denominations) has, de facto, helped to stem the influences of the Anglo-Saxon awakening, both from the theological point of view and from the musical one. Perhaps the clearest example of this is what the commissions for the editions of the Italian *Innario Cristiano* have put in writing in the minutes of their proceedings (kept in the historic archive of the Waldensian Church in Torre Pellice), as with the following example: "However, the songs were not left aside. On the contrary, a certain number has been added, but choosing them among those who

have some artistic and liturgical dignities. It was therefore inevitable to give up many melodies, or because they are unsuitable for collective singing, or because of poor level.” (Aime et al. 1969). As is easily understandable, this is also a breaking point between native congregations and migrant congregations.

Another interesting thing to point out for this hymn is the history that led to it being included in the hymnal, which also helps us understand why it is the only African-American spiritual present. Over the years, starting from the 1970s, this song has, in fact, been included several times in collections for use by youth groups or churches. The first time it was included in a collection was in 1970 (*Canzoniere 2 1970*), within the *Canzoniere 2*, i.e., the “product of the cadet camp which took place in Agape from 14 to 24 September 1970”. In this translation the text remains much closer to the original; in fact, we read: “on our knees we break bread together, when I fall to my knees, turning my gaze to You, Lord, have mercy on me”. We find it again in a collection produced by the Baptist churches in 1981 and edited by past. Saverio Guarna, with the following words: “We break the bread all together and, falling on our knees, we turn our gaze to you, Lord, have mercy on us”. This second version is in the middle: on the one hand the image of “being on our knees” is maintained, on the other the singular subject is lost in favor of the plural (*Cantiamo Insieme 1 1981*). We find this hymn again in a publication for Sunday Schools made in 1999 (Lorandi and Fuligno 1999). Here the translated text changes again, proposing a literal translation of the original, the same as that of 1970. The theological and political intent of the 2000 *Innario Cristiano* commission as set out above is therefore evident.

3.3. In Christ Alone

The last example that is proposed is of a contemporary song: In Christ Alone, music by Keith Getty and lyrics by Stuart Townend from 2002, Thankyou Music (EMI Christian Music Publishing). For this example, as above, we propose a comparison table for the texts (Table 13).

Table 13. In Christ Alone.

Original Lyrics	Italian Translation in <i>Celebriamo il Risorto</i> , 2014	English Translation of Italian Version
1. In Christ alone my hope is found. He is my light, my strength, my song. This Cornerstone, this solid ground Firm through the fiercest draught and storm. What heights of love! What depths of peace, When fears are stilled, when strivings cease. My Comforter, my all in all, Here in the love of Christ I stand.	1. In Cristo solo è saldo il cuor, forza e luce Egli è per noi; la Roccia solida su cui salva la vita noi abbiām. O immenso amor che calmi il cuor, ogni timor sai dissipar! Conforto vero sei Gesù, qui nel tuo amore salvi siām!	1. In Christ alone the heart is steadfast, strength and light He is for us; the solid Rock on which we save our lives. O immense love that calms the heart, you know how to dispel every fear! True comfort you are Jesus, here in your love save us!
2. In Christ alone, who took on flesh, Fullness of God in helpless Babe. This gift of love and righteousness Scorned by the ones He came to save Till on that cross as Jesus died The wrath of God was satisfied, For ev’ry sin on Him was laid. Here in the death of Christ I live.	Verse absent	Verse absent
3. There in the ground His body lay, Light of the world by darkness slain. Then bursting forth in glorious day, Up from the grave He rose again. And as He stands in victory, Sin’s curse has lost its grip on me. For I am His, and He is mine, bought with the precious blood of Christ.	3. Il corpo suo sepolto fu. Luce del mondo dove sei? Ma il terzo di resuscitò: vinse la morte il Salvator! E la condanna ch’era mia Non ha più presa su di me! Io sono suo ed Egli è mio, con il suo sangue mi comprò.	3. His body was buried. Light of the world where are you? But on the third day He was resurrected: the Savior conquered death! And the condemnation that was mine It no longer has a hold on me! I am his and He is mine, with his blood he bought me.
4. No guilt in life, no fear in death: This is the pow’r of Christ in me. From life’s first cry to final breath, Jesus commands my destiny. No pow’r of hell, no scheme of man Can ever pluck me from His hand. Till He returns or calls me home, Here in the pow’r of Christ I’ll stand.	4. Nessuna colpa né timor, Questa è la sua potenza in me! In lui vivrò e morirò, Egli decide il mio destin. Nessuna forza mai potrà Strapparmi via dalla sua man. Finché verrà e mi chiamerà Qui nel suo nome saldo sto!	4. No guilt or fear, This is the power of him in me! In him I will live and die, He decides my destiny. No force will ever be able to Tear me away from his hand. Until He comes and He calls me Here in his name I stand firm!

The first note to make is that this song was proposed to the Italian churches in Hymnal 2014, i.e., the last hymnbook made by the Baptist churches alone (without the help of

Methodists and Waldensians). We confirm, in fact, that in Italian Methodist and Waldensian churches this repertoire and this song in particular are not sung. Nonetheless, the influence that the Italian Reformed have had on the Baptists is clear: starting from the first two lines of the first verse we notice how some primary elements have been eliminated: the hope that Jesus gives, and the fact that He is “my light, my strength, my song”, not only eliminating these images, but also replacing the singular with the plural. The second verse disappears completely: the most disruptive elements are the references to the incarnation, to the wrath of God, and the vividness of the words used (and therefore of the images proposed). The third verse, however, presents an almost literal translation: the explicit reference to the “blood of Jesus”, very rare in the texts of this hymnal, is interesting. For the last verse, however, we note fidelity to the original, except for the reference to hell, which is actually uncommon in Italian texts (it is very often rendered in other hymns and songs with periphrasis).

4. Conclusions and Perspectives

In this essay I wanted to begin to scratch the surface of the vast hymn production of the Italian Protestant churches from a linguistic perspective, both through the publications of collections and hymnals, and through translation work. Three initial problems are highlighted on which we are committed to continuing study:

- dialogue with migrant and international churches, which have different approaches not only to music in worship in the strict sense, but also from a theological and ecclesiological point of view in general;
- the challenge of language both in terms of gender-inclusive language and of language capable of being put at the service of dialogue between local churches, between denominations, and in the Italian ecumenical movement (still small) in a new perspective of exchange, growth, and empowerment of minorities; and
- finally, I hope that this research I am conducting can be a spur not only to other Italian scholars, but also to the Italian Protestant churches themselves, which are not yet aware of the importance of studies on music in worship and congregational music studies.

The first problem is, therefore, the construction of a dialogue in historical Protestantism in Italy between migrant churches and native churches. Given the work that the FCEI and its Commission for Studies, Dialogue and Integration have been carrying out on an ecclesiological and theological level for more than twenty years, we want to highlight here how much work there is still to be done for music in worship and liturgy. We know well how important these two factors are in the religious life of individuals and of the communities of which they feel a part; the next starting point would therefore be to build this dialogue, so that hymnals and liturgical collections are designed for the purposes of building communities that are Church Together.

The second fundamental point is that of language, with two important considerations. First, many studies conducted on the topic ([Naso and Passarelli 2018](#); [Naso et al. 2019](#)) highlight a gender inclusivity problem, with the language used in church (and therefore also in singing) acting as the litmus test of a broader fact which involves the church (in theology, ecclesiology, and liturgy), society (understood both as a community of the individual and as a welcoming society), but also individuals (in the construction of their relationships: within the family, work-related, friendly, and community-based). Second, what language ideal should churches strive for in their congregational singing? The problem of “praying in the mother tongue” (as highlighted in [Naso et al. 2014](#); [Ambrosini et al. 2022](#)) is a very problematic and delicate case. On the one hand the use of Italian (as also foreseen by the laws of the Italian Republic) is a necessary factor for the construction of social inclusion, not only of individuals in society, but also of congregations within the local society in which they operate. On the other hand, it is important not to lose the roots of one’s own spirituality, as only in this way can one be an active part in the construction of a truly new integrated and hybrid community ([Ambrosini et al. 2018](#)). This problem of language is

also evident not only through the examples of the multilingual hymnals, but also in the translations of the three hymns presented.

The dimension of language, that of theology, and that of dialogue between cultures intersect with the sensitivities of individuals and local congregations, sometimes creating conflicts and sometimes mutual influence between cultures, giving life to that idea of “communion of saints”. Pastor Luca M. Negro expresses an idea that is one of the main points of my research (Annarilli 2023):

I believe that singing in worship responds, in addition to the need for community participation, also to a need which from a theological point of view is to express the communion of saints, which is spoken of in the great “Creeds”, in confession of faith of the Church. The confession of faith speaks of the communion of saints and this means, first of all, a temporal dimension, that is, it means that in the moment of worship we are in communion with believers of all generations. [...] The Bible invites us, in various verses of the Psalms, for example, to “sing a new song” for the Lord, not an old song; there is also the old song, but it is important that each generation finds ways to express its faith. And then, this again on the discussion of the communion of saints, also from a geographical point of view. I believe that it is important to understand what Universal Church means, that even the music that is made in the church is universal music. For this reason, if on the one hand it is right for a believer from America to go to a service in an Italian church and hear a hymn that he knows from America, this is fine, but it is also important to let yourself be surprised by the music of all the regions in which Christianity spread. (Negro 2022)

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