THE FORGOTTEN FRONT:
The Palermo Brothers and American Evangelical
Expansion in Post-War Italy

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As Joel Carpenter has pointed out, the period around and after World War II saw a resurgence among American evangelicals of a sense of moral custodianship for their country.¹ By mid-1945, as the vast tides of War began their final surge, organisations such as Youth For Christ were connecting with millions of Americans through new media, entertainment, and mass rallies. Concerned to reclaim their place as chaplains to the nation after the lost fundamentalist-modernist wars of the 1920s, the ‘new evangelicals’ reached out to associate themselves with every part of American life. Consequently, as soldiers, merchants, chaplains, teachers, health professionals and in a thousand other roles, they emerged from the ‘shelter belts’ of fundamentalist colleges and churches and went out into the world—with American armed forces during the war, and with internationalizing American businesses during the reconstruction and peace. Their watchword was ‘revival,’ and though some no doubt saw themselves as carriers of spiritual upsurge, many understood it as something, which the Holy Spirit did when the gospel was obediently preached. Adopting the rhetoric of the War, they opened ‘fronts,’ ‘mobilized’ forces, developed large organisations with ‘standard operating procedures,’ and went on the ‘offensive’ against the powers of darkness in the world.² With the military terminology came a parallel concern with global strategy. How it was that Italy, seen across much of the post-War period by the American State as a front line against Eurocommunism,³ became a ‘forgotten front’ in the parallel global evangelic expansion, is the theme of this paper.

² For a similar pattern prior to World War I, see Arthur N. Patrick, ‘Christianity and Culture in Colonial Australia: Selected Catholic, Wesleyan and Adventist Perspectives, 1891-1900’ (PhD diss., University of Newcastle, Newcastle, Australia, 1991).
The literature on the postwar evangelical expansion is now considerable. There are dozens of biographies or treatments of key figures such as Billy Graham, J.I. Packer, V. Raymond Edman, and others. Graham has particular iconic status, generating repeated treatment by scholars (from William Martin’s *Prophet with Honour* in 1991 through to Grant Wacker’s forthcoming life) seeking to understand developments in American religious life and culture in the post-war period. George Marsden’s opus (a remarkable amount of which has remained in print since *Fundamentalism and American Culture* first emerged in 1980) has laid the basis for an extensive exploration of evangelicalism by several generations of younger scholars, while others (e.g. Jon R. Stone’s *On the Boundaries of American Evangelicalism*) have used evangelicalism as a vehicle to explore changes in the broader society. Comparatively few, however, have explored beyond the Afro-American or Hispanic communities for connections in and through the migrant communities that came to the United States. This paper does just that, focusing on the post-war ministry of two then relatively well known evangelists in Italy, Phil and Louie Palermo. Their ministry track took them out of the Italian ghettos of Chicago, into the American evangelical mainstream, and then around the world with the ‘new evangelicalism’ of Youth for Christ and Billy Graham. Their negotiation of an Italo-American identity on both sides of the Atlantic is instructive as to the cultural assumptions of the post-War evangelical coalition, and how the world was viewed from middle American revivalism.

The Palermo brothers were born to an Italian family from Rende, Cosenza, Italy, and grew up in Melrose Park, Chicago. Their grandfather had left Cosenza for Argentina, but was killed (‘by bandits’) before he could bring the family over, leaving their mother (Josephine Vita) to grow up in a single-parent home in Cosenza. She and her sister, Rosina, married two brothers, Antonio and Gasparo (Jasper) Palermo, the latter of whom migrated to the USA in 1906, finding his way to Cook County, Chicago. The extended family soon followed to this bur-

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4 Among the few one might include R.D. Kernohan, *An Alliance Across the Alps: Britain and Italy’s Waldensians* (Haddington, UK: Handsel Press, 2005); Enrico Cumbo, “‘Your Old Men Will Dream Dreams”: The Italian Pentecostal Experience in Canada, 1912-1945,’ *Journal of American Ethnic History* 19:3 (April 2000): 35–81, etc. Much of this story is captured in the monographs of the first and second-generation migrant clergy, e.g. Anthony Mangano, Frank Gigliotti, Angelo di Domenica, and the like.
geneoning industrial and transport centre, which was pulling labour and skills in from around the world. Jasper paid for Antonio’s fare, and the family joined Jasper and his family in Chicago c. 1910. Their younger brother Benedetto (Ben) came out with their parents in 1913, arriving on 1 July on the S.S. Canada.⁵

Antonio and Josephine Palermo had married in Italy (1900) and had two sons in Rende before migrating. In Chicago the family grew rapidly: their only daughter (Anna) was born c. 1910, followed by six more boys: Victor, Rocco, Dominic, Luigi Adolfo (Louie Adolph, 1915-2002, or ‘Louie’), Filippo Tomaso (Philip Thomas, ‘Phil,’ 1918-2003) and George. Poverty was ameliorated by cheap food and family links settled around them in Melrose Park.⁶ ‘There was spaghetti every day at the Palermo house’ at 2445 West Huron Street, though not always meat. Phil would say that he was 12 years old before he ate anything else. They all remembered the ‘wars’ between the boys, which left them scratched and bruised. It was a tough neighbourhood: Al Capone drew his soldiers from this and other Italian migrant settings,⁷ and the boys remember seeing John Dillinger’s blood on the sidewalk outside the Biograph Theatre where he was finally shot and killed.⁸

The stories of poverty (miseria) both in Italy and America, the counter-trope to the later story of redeeming faith, is a common one among Italian migrants. As Franca Iacovetta remembers of her own upbringing, ‘most of us grew up acutely conscious of our immigrant heritage, and we were inundated with countless stories of the hardships our elders endured as newcomers.’⁹ Like many of their neighbours, the Palermos were labourers, who over time rose to work in factories. In 1918,

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⁵ Ellis Island migration records; Ancestry.com collections relating to US Census 1906-1940.
⁹ Iacovetta, Such Hardworking People, x.
Jasper was working in Wisconsin, for Nash Motors, while Rosina remained with the children in Chicago. Phil remembered his uncle Ben as ‘short, husky and strong... and in later years slightly bent over from a life of hard, manual labour.’\(^{10}\) Antonio worked for the City of Chicago, digging ditches for $1.50 per day. Phil and Louie were on the same path - the 1940 census records Louie as a ‘melter’ and Phil as a ‘buffer’ earning $13 a week in a jewelry and novelty factory. The conditions were dusty, and potentially deleterious to health.

It was in these circles—of craftsmen, labourers, honest tradesmen—that the Palermos (Ben, first of all) encountered the Assemblea Cristiana. A religious family,\(^{11}\) Antonio saw his large mob of boys attend mass each week. For his brother Ben, however, Catholicism was a cultural form that hardly touched his life. One day, however, he was challenged by a workmate, Giuseppe Marchese, about his swearing (which, in Italian, often means the use of colourful religious terms). This led to a conversation in which Marchese handed Ben a Gospel of Luke, and explained the evangelical understanding of salvation. As was often the case with Italians,\(^{12}\) Ben took the tract home, read it and self-converted both himself and his immediate family. They started to attend the pentecostal Assemblea Cristiana, about 1.5 miles away on West Erie St., and spread the news among the wider family. His brother, Antonio wasn’t pleased: it took months for Ben to help him understand a concept of salvation distinct from membership in the Catholic Church.

The children, however, were captured by the music which their cousins taught them in the bedroom, while more heated conversations were going on in the kitchen. Relationships were strained, Antonio ordering his brother not to speak of these things in his house: he eventu-

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\(^{10}\) Phil and Louie Palermo, with Bernard Palmer, Atsa Louie, Im’a Phil (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1975). Unless otherwise indicated, references to statements by the Palermo brothers will relate to this source.

\(^{11}\) A term which meant much more than simply ‘Catholic’: See Anna Maria Dell’Oso’s reference to the convergence of faith, nationality and migrant status in what she called ‘Sant’italia’ (in ‘The Sewing Machine,’ in Growing Up Italian in Australia: Eleven Young Australian Women Talk About Their Childhood, ed. B. Walsh (Sydney: State Library of New South Wales Press, 1993, 48; and Iacovetta, Such Hardworking People, 136-139.

\(^{12}\) di Domenica, Protestant Witness of a New American, 20-21, tells a story about his brother with some similarities; also see my Pellegrini: An Italian Protestant Community in Sydney, 1958-1998, for accounts of auto-conversion in Sicily and the USA.
ally banned him from returning altogether. Years passed. In 1926, Josephine fell ill with what appeared to be terminal stomach cancer. She was given the last rites, while the wider family prayed for healing. The story is a familiar one in Italian circles - after praying to all the saints and the Virgin, in desperation, Josephine asked God to help her pray (in Ben’s words) ‘in Spirit and in truth.’ She fell asleep for the first time in weeks. When she awoke, the pain was gone; she had quite a job explaining to her doctors that she was not hysterical, and that she had been healed. When she got home, Josephine informed the family that she didn’t care if Ben’s religion was the craziest, most mixed up religion in the world, they were all going to attend the Assemblea Cristiana. The 12 year old Louie later remembered that he had to borrow some shoes from a friend in the apartment upstairs, and shine them with bacon fat, in order to be sufficiently dressed for the occasion. While the boys were mainly attracted to the piano which graced the auditorium, they were soon caught up in the relentless flow of the life of the church.

The Assemblea Cristiana had been founded in 1907 as a result of an overflow out of the Azusa Street Revival, mediated by the affect of William H. Durham’s North Avenue mission on the ‘Chiesa dei Toscani.’ Former leaders such as Luigi Francesconi, Pietro Ottolini and Giacomo Lombardi had already spread out into the world to plant churches. During Phil and Louie’s youth the pastor was co-founder Pietro Menconi. When the Palermos joined the church, the revivalist origins were still a powerful influence, with meetings six nights of the week.

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13 Palermo and Palermo, Atsa Louie..., Chapter 2.
14 Note Iacovetta’s statement about openness to other forms of spirituality, Such Hardworking People, 140: ‘In tackling problems, Italians also sought out the talents of a host of miracle workers and psychics, who peddled their magic in Little Italy. Palm readers, witches, sorcerors, and medicine folk all vied for the business of immigrant families. Their popularity both reflected the immigrants traditional distrust of medical doctors, and offered them yet another line of defence.’ See also the filmic representation (2000) of folk medicines in Kate Woods’ version of Melina Marchetta’s Looking for Alibrandi.
15 This history has been extensively explored, both in the USA and in Italian literature, see F. Toppi, Luigi Francesconi: Antisignano del Risveglio Pentecostale Italiano (Roma: ADIMedia, 2008); Eugenio Stretti, Il Movimento Pentecostale: Le Assemblee di Dio in Italia (Torino: Claudiana, 1998); Salvatore Esposito, Un Secolo di Pentecostalismo Italiano. Cenni sulle Origini, Le Discussioni Parlamentari, L’assetto Contemporaneo delle Assemblee di Dio in Italia (Milano: The Writer, 2013).
When Josephine Palermo asked why they didn’t run something on the seventh night, Menconi reportedly replied that they needed one night to be able to take a bath. Josephine offered to run a prayer meeting in their Melrose Park home. The Palermos and Menconis became close in the work, a relationship which was consolidated with the marriage of Anna to Jim Menconi (b. 1909). Josephine became a regular home visitor, combining social welfare with personal evangelism. Parcels of food, even when her own family was often short on supplies, did much to overcome the rejection which conversion from the Community’s common Catholicism had caused. The West Huron Street prayer meeting brought pentecostal fervency into the lives of many people in the area, and became the model for personal evangelism which the boys would retain until the end of their lives. An early convert was Phil’s godfather, Pasquale Marchese, who brought his own family with him. His son, John, would become pastor of the ‘Christian Assembly’ in Melrose Park, planted out of the original Assemblea.17

Their experience in pentecostal circles made the boys fervent prayers, an attribute which endeared them to those with whom they worked. Without money for lessons, the old pump organ (bought for $5 as a way accompanying singing at the Saturday night prayer meeting) also became the means by which the boys self-taught themselves to play keyboard. Louie’s later statement – that ‘I can honestly say that I had no human teacher to help me master the fundamentals of music’ – could easily have been a statement from Bonnie Brae Street.18 He then set about learning the guitar by joining the church’s string band, and watching where the guitar player put his fingers. A cousin bought a piano accordion, and Louie taught himself to play that as well, building on his organ and guitar skills. When the family bought a piano, Louie spent so much time on it that his mother locked the lid and hid the key to get some quiet in the house. Louie learned to pick the lock. He also taught Phil to play the guitar on the basis of a promise to only ‘play

17 In 2007, the original AC, which had been renamed the Church of the Full Gospel, merged with the Polish-based Good Shepherd Bible Church, to become Good Shepherd Christian Assembly, at 6120 N. Harlem Ave.

songs for Jesus,’ and began to do the same for other boys in the church. ‘Every practice session ended with a prayer meeting.’

After conversion and experience in the Italian church’s youth group, they began to think of ways to reach out to a relatively difficult, largely Roman Catholic, subculture. The brothers were not alone – a note from Elmer Erutti (Pietro Ottolini’s grandson, 1919-2008) in the Billy Graham Archives at Wheaton College–indicates their connections to the broader Italian pentecostal scene. Their music took them to open air meetings in Humboldt Park, sometimes with their own church, sometimes in support of the Salvation Army. ‘Testimony’ was central to both traditions, and soon the boys found themselves preaching in public. Their music gave them skills that enabled them to choose to do something other than factory work. An offer from a pastor friend to assist in a Church in Akron, Ohio, saw Louie leave home for a year. On his return to Chicago, he teamed up with Joey Bonecek, playing around rescue missions and making a name for themselves, before coming to the attention of ‘Hallelujah Joe’ Ankerberg, superintendent of the Douglas Park Rescue Mission. Through his son, Floyd Ankerberg, they joined the ‘Chicago Midnight Brigade,’ a band which played and witnessed on the streets late at night around Chicago’s North Side. Phil soon joined, and the two became regular attenders at the Pacific Garden Mission and its activities – ‘there were a million pulpits, a million garbage cans to stand on’ so they could preach on street corners after services. The charismatic Ankerberg was also their first connection into regional Scandinavian evangelicalism, and (as pastor of Bethel Baptist Church in Cicero, IL) into the emerging world of evangelical revivalism.20


As it had since the first outward thrust in 1908, their home Church, the Assemblea Cristiana, continued to be an organizing point for churches among the Italian diaspora. In 1936, Menconi took Josephine with him to LaSalle, Illinois, where a group of Italian Christians were meeting in houses. On the way, a drunk driver coming in the other direction slammed head on into Menconi’s car, killing the driver (Vittorio Baldi), critically injuring Menconi, trapping Josephine under the car and throwing the unconscious 18-year old Phil out of the vehicle. After he pulled the others out of the car, Phil found himself praying fervently for help, and promising that he would serve God ‘wherever and whenever.’ After being left standing on the side of the road, Phil managed to get the Pastor to hospital in the back of a milk truck, cradling his head in his hands. Menconi died five days later, his mother mostly recovered, though she would suffer pain in her wrist for the rest of her life. Tragedy called for redeeming response - for Phil, it was the call that had come to him as he stood beside the road.21

In January 1938, with Ankerberg’s Midnight Brigade, Phil and Louie were featured evangelists at the small independent Baptist church of Al Pontious, in Muskegon, MI. The services expanded and expanded, eventually running for 16 weeks - ‘Scores came to Christ’ each night, the services moving from the small church to an empty building. Charles Greer and then Paul Bennett came to preach the services. ‘We never did go back to our jobs’ remembered Phil: this ‘revival’ launched the Palermo boys on what became a ‘worldwide ministry.’ The Ankerbergs were early sponsors, introducing the Palermo Brothers to a wider circle of churches. The Minnesota experience also unexpectedly connected them with Italian communities there: when his mother found out, she raised some money from the boys, bought a train ticket, and began running meetings in West Duluth. To her great joy, she was arrested for disturbing the peace and handing out propaganda - only to be released to more days of evangelism in the local community. The brothers had their own involvements. Immediately after Muskegon, Bennett took them back with him to Missouri, where they spent another 13 weeks. War came with the bombing of Pearl Harbor, and travel became more difficult due to petrol rationing: their brother joining them to

21 The sense of being ‘spared for some greater mission’ attached to a story recounting a near death experience, is common in the literature: see di Domenica, Protestant Witness, 15: ‘It seems evident that once again the Lord had saved my life for a purpose.’
make up the ‘Palermo Trio’ until George (d. 1969) was called up. At the centre of all their preaching was their testimony, and at the centre of their testimony (told through their tract ‘A Modern Miracle of Healing’) was their mother’s miracle.

In 1943, Phil and Louie both married Minnesotan Swedish-American girls and moved out of Chicago to Minneapolis and Mora (respectively). Edee (1917-2011) and Jeanne (1917-) were regular features in their performances for several years, teaching the boys to sing Swedish songs as part of their repertoire. This proved useful: Phil’s study at the Evangelical Free Church seminary in Chicago ‘mainstreamed’ the boys, and their connection to A.J. Thorwall, director of evangelism for the EFC, opened up a further network of ethnic churches. The War opened up many opportunities. Ironically, just as their personal lives were attaching them more to Minnesota than Melrose Park, more to the evangelical mainstream than to the ethnic minority, in 1943-44, the brothers began to work in a number of Italian Prisoner of War camps, singing and preaching in Italian. One P.O.W., Giuseppe ‘Joe’ Molinaro, originated in their common hometown of Rende, Calabria. Not only did this make connections for them, but they were encouraged to think of going to Italy when the War should end.

In fact, the War made America ready for the Palermo Brothers in a number of ways. First, it brought Italians out of the ghetto, gave them a role in the national striving against Fascism, and joined them to the national vision. Even those who so deeply entrenched in the ghetto that they could never escape ~ people like Lucky Luciano ~ found a way of serving their country. Italian-American entertainers made their way into American homes via radio and records in ever growing numbers ~ from those with recognizable names (such as Buddy De Franco) to those whose stage names (Bobby Darin) hid their origins. As Mark Rotella notes, Dean Martin’s appropriation of an Italian folk song as the hit That’s Amore became the introduction to Italian migrant culture

22 Thorwall’s boldness and connections led to some memorable meetings, including with the Secretary General of the United Nations, Trygve Lie.

23 See, in particular, the work of Frank Gigliotti, in The Fabulous Frank Gigliotti: An Incredibly Career ([privately printed]: La Mesa, CA, n.d.), and my forthcoming ‘La Farina del Diavolo: Transnational Migration and the Politics of Religious Liberty in Post-War Italy.’ See also Roy Palmer Domenico, “For The Cause of Christ Here in Italy”: America’s Protestant Challenge in Italy and the Cultural Ambiguity of the Cold War,” Diplomatic History 29:4 (September 2005): 635.
for many Anglo-Americans. It opened the flood gates: no longer would Italians in public view be referred to as Joe Di Maggio was in Life Magazine in 1939: ‘Although he learned Italian first, Joe now speaks English without an accent. ... Instead of olive oil or smelly bear grease, he keeps his hair slicked with water. He never reeks of garlic and prefers chicken chow mein to spaghetti.’\[^{24}\] American multiculturalism had a powerfully homogenizing core, mobilizing among migrants a desire to ‘fit in,’ be considered at one with the nation. It was a politics of desire which the new evangelicals captured in mobilizing a post-War support base.

Secondly, mobilization and mobility for millions of Americans contingent on the War opened up opportunities for entrepreneurial evangelists. People like Paul Guinness and Jack Wyrtzen held large rallies which included entertainment, singing, and vigorous preaching. Though originally widely scattered along the mobilization routes and large cities in which members of the armed forces and their families gathered, Wyrtzen (New York), Walter Smyth (Philadelphia), George Wilson (Minneapolis), Edward Darling (Detroit) and Torrey Johnson from Chicago gathered in common cause, meeting at Winona Lake, Indiana, to form a temporary organization, Youth for Christ (YFC). Torrey Johnson was elected Chairman, and Billy Graham became the organizations’ first full-time evangelist. The organisation followed the armed forces overseas, at first in serving and chaplaincy roles, and then increasingly as evangelists in the post war world. Local chapters of YFC were founded around the world, even as Graham’s massive global success made way for new ventures and new countries. In 1946, Graham led the first campaigns in Britain, forming relationships that birthed a vision for impacting on Europe. Torrey Johnson saw the opportunity before YFC as the spiritual equivalent of the Marshall Plan - building a new society on an old one destroyed by war and sin. The Johnson-Graham visit to Europe in 1946 (though a minor event in public terms) convinced them that ‘Europe was spiritually bankrupt.’\[^{25}\] Just as France was the target for Eisenhower in his reconstruction of Western European defences against Soviet pressure, so it would also become for YFC and the Graham Organisation. There was a desire to touch other coun-


\[^{25}\] Palermo and Palermo, Atta Louie, Im’a Phil, 68
tries - such as Italy - but few resources and fewer contacts. Who would they send?"\(^{26}\)

Louie and Phil first saw Graham in one of Torrey Johnson’s Chicagoland YFC evangelistic rallies, and by 1945 were appearing on stage with him. (At the time, Phil was still living in Melrose Park, at 1102 N.21st Ave). In 1948, along with Graham himself, and others such as Harold Ockenga, Cliff Barrows and Corrie Ten Boom, Louie and Phil would be part of the Youth for Christ Congress at Winona Lake, which formalised that organisation. The realisation that they had a part to play in the Johnson-Graham plan for Europe was thus a convergence of their personal identities, their mothers’ evangelistic fervour, the need of the YFC for European language skills, and the Assemblea Cristiana tradition (since 1908) of sending missionaries back to Italy. Unlike a Giacomo Lombardi, however, who was guided by visions and voices,\(^{27}\) theirs’ was a suitably conventionalised ‘calm assurance that came over us,’ for which there was ‘no explaining.’\(^{28}\) At a meeting with Johnson and Graham in Chicago, Johnson made it clear that – given the still fluid state of affairs in post-War Italy, and YFC plans for extension to Europe—‘sooner’ was better. He committed $5000 to the campaign.\(^{29}\) The brothers wrote some letters, raised support among the churches where they had itinerated (including the Christian Assembly and Emmanuel Baptist Church in Mora, Minnesota),\(^{30}\) and left for Italy on 14 October, 1947. They were farewelled by the Salvation Army band in Minneapolis (11 October), by Torrey Johnson and uncle Jasper in Chicago, and from the Bethesda Church, New York (on 13 October). The farewells were not just about good will: the new jeep shipped to Italy for the tour was paid for out of donations at the farewell organized by George Wilson in the Minneapolis Municipal Auditorium. Nor were they isolated: YFC had six international teams already in the field. In


\(^{27}\) F. Toppi, Giacomo Lombardi (Roma: ADIMedia, 1996).

\(^{28}\) Palermo and Palermo, Ata Louie, Im’a Phil, 69. Whether this was their ghostwriter’s literary voice or theirs is difficult to determine.

\(^{29}\) T. Johnson to P. Palermo, 17 Sept 1947, P & L Palermo Collection, Billy Graham Archives, Wheaton College [hereinafter, BGA].

\(^{30}\) ‘Palermos Leaving for Italy’, Kanabec Co. Times [Sept 1947], in PA: Palermo, Phil and Louis, Folder V, BGA.
the same week that Chicago farewelled the Palermos, T. W. Wilson and the Couriers for Christ Quartet were being farewelled on their way to Ireland by Torry Johnson and Billy Graham at the Midwest Bible Church.

The brothers’ first stop was in London—where the secretary of the BYFC and Rev. Tom Livermore, its Director met them. In Rome, on 16 October, Antonio Francis ‘Frank’ Scorza, head of the Italian Gospel Association (IGA), met them. Like the Palermos, Scorza had been converted in the USA and lived in Chicago, though in his case it was through the earlier influence of Reuben A. Torrey and the Moody Bible Institute. While training there, he raised money to send bibles back to Italy, and was for 27 years pastor of the Moody Italian mission in Chicago, before establishing the IGA. There had been tensions between the pentecostal Assemblea community and Scorza’s Italian mission in the 1910s, despite the fact that Frank had family members in both groups.31 There were no such tensions now between the Palermos and Scorza, however — in 1947, Phil and Louie were travelling on the most impeccable of evangelical credentials. These poor boys from Chicago’s Cook County were also, after a sorts, evangelical merchants — Louie carried an empty accordion case, in the expectation he would be able to buy an original from Italy, and packed the space with suits to give to the pastors they met. It was a trade indicative of the globalising evangelical religious economy:32 spiritual entertainment went hand in hand with materiality and respectability. Even before they held a meeting, Frank and Phil went shopping for an accordion, parting with L200,000 (c. US$380.00) at Radio Alati for a 1947 Mariano Dallape e Figlio. The next day, they were tourists, visiting St Peter’s Basilica and (ironically, for Americans) expressing shock at seeing the ‘millions in

31 Scorza’s brother Nicola was a member of the Assemblea. See S. Galati, Diaries of a Fractured Family (Maitland, FL: Xulon Press, 2009), 102ff.
gold and precious stones displayed there while people starved on the streets.’ There was ‘plenty to eat, but prices sky high,’ as black marketers sought to control supply, so they ate spaghetti until it was ‘coming out of our ears.’ That afternoon, they visited the Salvation Army, and began to connect with local pastors (including those from the Baptist, some independents, and the Waldensian Church).

Their first service was an informal one, held among a handful of people in the hotel chapel - there were four ‘conversions,’ which the relentlessly statistics-driven Americans thought a promising start. The first rally was held on the 19th after a morning service at the impressive Waldensian church on Via 4 Novembre. They drew ‘a good crowd’ and a ‘fine response’ with considerable enthusiasm being shown for future rallies. Tourists to the core, the service was followed by an evening walk through the Forum and around the Coloseum. The next evening, the brothers convened a meeting of 25 local pastors with a view to establishing a local chapter of YFC. On the 22nd, they travelled on a packed train to Naples, the evidence of the War everywhere to be seen as they left relatively untouched Rome for the heavily bombed environs for Ca sino and south. Naples was a ‘city of horror,’ where starvation and poverty ‘the like of which one never imagined existed’ walked the streets. Children begged, and slept on the sidewalks; families lived in holes or the basements of bombed out buildings. The brothers arranged to meet with Vincenzo Nitti, the local Methodist minister and scion of a great anti-fascist Neapolitan family, with regard to bringing YFC to Naples. Their Depression upbringing stood them in good stead – the brothers never left a meal without pocketing a piece of bread or two, a practice which gave them something to give away to the young people who begged from them. Finally annoyed when his pockets were empty, Phil pointedly told some children to ‘ask the priest.’

The ‘sentiment is that [the] Vatican is to blame for [the] poverty,’ an extension of southern anticlericalism that would fuel their campaigns: there was a ‘great job to be done.’

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35 Diary 2, 23 October 1947, P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.
bus station while seeing a young mother eating dry bread, or scribbling into his diary the miscellaneous items which were ground into the flour (sawdust, hay, fennel seeds...)\(^36\) in order to extend it during the War.

By 24 October, they were due to travel to Catanzaro, Calabria, the home town of the Scorzas, and near where the Palermo family itself had originated. In their military descriptions back home, Catanzaro was the ‘headquarters’ to which American aid for the destitute and needy could be sent.\(^37\) Neither the Jeep nor Louie’s trunks had arrived, however, due (as it turned out) to a strike in New York. The brothers instead travelled by train, practicing their Italian songs, thinking their way back into an identity submerged in an American experience marked by assimilation and cultural penalties for demonstrating difference. They became aware, at least in the incidentals, as to how different from Americanized they had become. On the train Phil wrote that they had a ‘dago lunch... ham, bread, cheese... Everybody here drinks wine, except Louie and I.’\(^38\) They were exhausted by the walking, the lack of variety in the food, the lack of amenity in accommodation, running water and consumables. In correspondence home, they referred to themselves as ‘a couple of Minnesotans.’\(^39\) On the other hand, they also had to untangle their American wealth from the gospel they preached: as they noted later on their return to the family’s home town, ‘Everybody around here want to be evangelists if we leave them our car, shoes – or take them to America.’\(^40\)

In Catanzaro, they were met by Frank Scorza’s brother Ernesto, and Phil thought there was ‘great possibility’ for revival services in this ‘lovely small town’ high in the mountains. Lovely it may have been, but of infrastructure there was little – travelling by horse and buggy, their first meeting packed 60 people into Ernesto Scorza’s lounge room, because there was no Protestant church building to be had. After several such meetings, there was ‘a great spirit of conviction’ in the lounge room, and ‘several definite conversions.’ The depth of the understand-

\(^{36}\) See Hutchinson, *Pellegrini*, for a description of similar survival activities among Pentecostal families in southern Italy during this period.


\(^{39}\) ‘Letter from Italy’.

\(^{40}\) Diary 2, 13 Dec 1947, P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.
ing that accompanied the emotion was variable. One ‘young man said he hadn’t swore [sic] once since last night – “Now I can say that I am Evangelical.”’\footnote{Diary, 2 November 1947, P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.} On top of their feelings of separation from their wives, the need to ‘walk and walk’ everywhere, and the absence of ‘some good American food,’ a relatively ‘flat’ bible study left them ‘very discouraged.’\footnote{Diary 2, 30 October 1947, P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.} More space was needed. Frank’s older brother, Anton Scorza, had held meetings in the theatre of this, their hometown, and so the Palermo brothers made inquiries whether it could be used. When it proved to be unavailable, they booked out the Hotel dance hall for meetings. After planning to use it for a week, that too was denied to them. The realities of evangelici in Italy were born in upon him: ‘There is no tolerance here in Italy. There is no freedom of speech or religion as we see it in America.’ Instead, they now packed 100 people into the Greco sister’s lounge room, ‘the power of Holy Spirit’ convicting many to conversion. ‘God turned defeat into glorious victory.’\footnote{Diary, 6 November 1947, P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.} Working with individuals on the streets (‘personal work’) was a necessary part of the tour, and it resulted in some dozens of young people responding to their message. The brothers buried an associate of Ernesto Scorza’s, and planned to leave the next day (9 November) for Naples to pick up their Jeep. It was not without a visit to the Police Station, where the maresciallo quizzed them as to what they would report on the activities of local communists when they returned to America. The brothers were not used to such heavy-handed control: ‘Just wait until we get to good old America,’ Phil noted in his Diary, intimating the pressure he believed that external media attention might bring to bear on such local intolerance.

Even on their return to Naples, there were further delays. It would not be until 3 December that they could get the Jeep out of the port, and then they had to ‘pay everyone and their aunt.’ In the meantime, the brothers wandered around town, witnessing the clashes between the military and the Communist marching groups, the devastation left behind from the withdrawal of colonial and foreign troops, the omnipresence of American sailors now that the US Sixth Task Fleet was in. On the one hand this latter was a hindrance, the impact of military bases on local populations no different here than through much of his-
tory. On the other hand, the close association between Riccardo Santi’s ministry at Casa Materna orphanage (Portici) and wartime GIs established an ongoing relationship with US evangelicals which the Palermos discovered was blossoming into a proposal for an Evangelical Hospital in the city. In the ruins, as their connections (with orphanages, Waldensian, Methodist and Baptist pastors) expanded so did their meetings—some 300 packed the Waldensian Church, with good results; another meeting of 300 in the Baptist Church left them convinced that ‘Revival fires are burning’ (a sentiment they cabled back to YCFI in the USA with the request to ‘send money’). ‘Revival is on – Amen,’ Phil noted in his private Diary.44

At several of their meetings, an ex-priest (Ugo de Lucia) and an ex-monk featured symbols of their hopes to overturn Catholic cultural domination. (Not all were convinced – one ‘stale, stinking deacon’ poured cold water on their enthusiasms for new developments.) Resistance to interdenominational work among established Protestant churches was more of a rarity than it would be in later years, however. The brothers repeatedly reported being able to ‘smash through,’ even when local pastors dominated the pulpit, or denominational differences created tensions. ‘Before we came to Italy,’ they wrote back to YFC supporters in the USA, ‘we were discouraged by many who said YOUTH FOR CHRIST would not and could not go “over” in Italy. But thanks be to God, the impossible has happened.’45 The pressure of the Catholicized culture, however, was the war for the present, the ‘darkness’ which reinforced inequality and pushed the working classes towards revolutionary doctrines. It was reinforced in the brothers as they circulated in the communities of memory which had witnessed sixteenth century Waldensians massacred and Evangelicals of the 1930s and 1940s beaten and imprisoned under the Catholic/Fascist alliance,46 or (as in the case of the town priest, Don Pepe, who was reputed to have eight children from a string of relationships) where the public morality of the Church diverged from its private practice. ‘Go to the piazza Val-

46 And see Riccardo Santi’s account of the ‘war engaged in by the Neapolitan Curia … against the Casa Materna’, defeated only by the rallying of civil liberties lawyers against the efforts of the Commune to close the orphanage down. (in Casa Materna 41st Annual Report, Vol. 5, PA: Palermo, Phil and Louis, BGA).
dese,’ declared De Lucia in one of their meetings near Cosenza: ‘and grab a handful of dirt, squeeze it and blood will come out, from your forefathers who were massacred. Dig the graves and you will find protestants, dig more and you'll find the bones of the primitive Christians.’

At a meeting in Torre Annunziata, when some 3000 people packed the theatre, hecklers cried out ‘Viva il Papa,’ while armed police surveyed the crowd to keep communists and Catholics apart. In Sicily, these weren’t stories of ‘that took place in the reign of Fascism, but PRESENT DAY FACTS! People are asking us, “Where is the religious liberty we were supposed to have?” What can we answer them? God forbid that our American boys shed their blood here in vain.’

In Guardia Piemontese, the opposition to meetings in a local theatre by the local Bishop was treated as a victory for the gospel, and ‘defeat’ for the opposition. And there was other detritus left over from the past War—in addition to the syphilis, orphaned children, illiteracy that they found in Naples, they also found themselves staying in the same hotel (the Turistico) as Lucky Luciano and his bodyguards. When their Jeep wouldn’t start, Luciano’s ‘gorillas’ gave them a push-start (they would see him again in Palermo, Sicily, on 2 January, 1948). They drove off to their paese (Rende, Cosenza), into which they had ‘a feeling we were driving home’ to a place they had never been.

The Jeep proved a draw-card, and the brothers used every opportunity to its greatest impact. Stopping in Albanella (south of Battipaglia), they waited until a crowd formed, and then took out their instruments to play. Handing out flyers, they drove off to other nearby towns to announce their meetings—sometimes bringing ‘greetings from America’ to this family or that—only to return that night to meetings in the local Methodist church. Then it was on to Cosenza, where they stayed when not surrounded by uncles and aunts and cousins in Rende (‘we were related to half the town’), just to the north. Their identity gained another strand when they were told that the Palermos had a Jewish (‘Hebrew’) background. They sang and sang, and preached to ‘a great multitude’ of relatives, many of whom were poor or still carrying the after-effects of war and deprivation. Numbers of family members,

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and of POWs that they had originally met in the USA, came to faith. ‘God is doing the impossible here in Italy – Hallelujah.’ Like many of those who had returned in the 1920s and 1930s, the brothers began to dream of a Protestant church in Rende. YFC paid the bills, however, and so the visit was disrupted by a quick dash south to apply for an extended visa, take possession of clothes and other charitable goods, and to organize the YFC structure in Catanzaro. On their return, the round of preaching to relatives resumed, though they were ‘real tired’ by now, and concerned about the limitations on their activities on this ‘forgotten Italian front.’ Just when they dipped in energy, however, the work seemed to break out afresh – just after Christmas, for example, they held an open air meeting in the piazza in Rende which drew 1000 people, to whom they played and sang off the back of the Jeep. In teaching them gospel choruses, Phil was greeted with applause when he remarked that Jesus would not excommunicate them if they sang along. Then they were on the move again, leaving Cosenza on 29 December to drive to Sicily via Catanzaro. They were ‘expecting great things from God’ as they judiciously lobbed tracts from the car window to passers-by.

The brothers arrived in Messina just in time to hold a meeting in the local Waldensian church: ‘very good crowd, much enthusiasm.’ This was to be expected: Sicily, after all, was among the most independent of Italy’s regional cultures, featured high levels of anticlericalism, and was among the most receptive areas for evangelical Christianity. The island was still in convulsions over brigandry and increasingly organized crime – the brothers drove past the reputed hiding place of Salvatore Giuliano, the ‘last of the peoples’ bandits’ (Hobsbawm), and lunched in Corleone. During their stay there, the (false) rumour got back to Cosenza that Louie had been killed in Palermo – the town was in an uproar. At the same time, Sicily was undergoing a quiet spiritual revolution, with the rapid growth of the country’s largest Pentecostal communities. Phil and Louie’s experience in Palermo was typical. For the first time, as well as meetings in the Waldensian church, they held a meeting at a Pentecostal church: ‘large crowd, good spirit, several responded to the invitation. My how the people sang – best yet in all Italy.’

49 Diary, 2 January, 1948, P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.
by Antonio Di Biasi, who had been sent with singer Aldo Coniglio from Montreal, Canada, by the Christian Church of North America (CCNA).\(^5\) These people sang so well because here, unlike in Campania, they had already learned them in Di Biasi’s campaigns in the Teatro Communale. The Palermo brothers stepped into, rather than caused, an ongoing, regional revival in which ‘Nti tutti i cantuni si s’intia canta-ri: Questo mondo ho lasciato per sempre’ (‘on every street corner you heard people singing, “I have left this world forever.”’\(^5\)) On travelling (with Di Biasi) to the small town of Raffadali, though the local pastor was not expecting them, the Palermo brothers were again surprised: 2 hours warning was enough to draw 500 people to a meeting. They did not yet know that this was one of the oldest and largest of the Sicilian Pentecostal churches, the organizing point from which the Assemblee di Dio would be formed.\(^5\) The ‘many saved’ under the Palermo brothers was in fact a continuation of an upsurge which had already been under way for at least several years.\(^5\)

The support of existing churches was not always an advantage: strong congregations and the sharp experiences of the fascist period diminished the need for cooperation between churches, weakening enthusiasm for inter-denominational efforts such as YFC. The brothers were not aware of the fundamental differences between the liberalizing Waldensian/Methodist traditions and the literalistic Pentecostal congregations. Nor were they aware of the divisions within the Pentecostal movement over moves towards the formation of a formal intesa with the state, and incorporation into a national Assemblee di Dio (Assemblies of God). Young people showed ‘much interest and enthusiasm,’ but the ‘pastors were slow to consent.’ It was a challenge to the brothers, who had grown to believe that YFC was ‘the answer to troubled Italy and Sicily.’\(^5\) As the year drew to a close, Phil (preparing for a phone call to a New Years Day YFC rally in Minneapolis, during which Louie found his son had been born that morning) summed up the trip so far as:

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Had 41 meetings to date
78 days in Italy to date
82 days since left Minneapolis
Scores of souls saved in rallies and homes, etc.\textsuperscript{55}

Here in Sicily, too, the poverty was striking, the ‘persecution’ (under lingering Fascist regulations) evident,\textsuperscript{56} the effects of the War (in this case of the American bombing during the invasion) especially evident. This was also the case in the small towns (such as Salemi, where they stopped to see the Cutrona and Calistro families) where the brothers brought greetings from relatives in Chicago. The introduction would be made, they would play a song, and then ‘witness’ to the family, often with effect. After Raffadali, the brothers drove to Ravanusa for a meeting, then to Catania via Nicosia, where they visited another Christian family connection from Chicago.

In contrast to Raffadali, Catania was one of the largest cities on the island – and one in which the simmering tensions of the post-War period were not far below the surface. As he sat in the foyer of the Hotel d’Italia, a ‘young man told me [that] “We expect a revolution here in Catania any day.”’ Instruments could only be used in the basement of the Waldensian church, to avoid tensions with the police and neighbours. After a couple of meetings, one of which featured Dr. Lucio Mirabelli (a scientist born in Rende, and was nephew to Francesco Lento in Chicago), the brothers drove to Messina. Apart from their normal tract distribution, they were aware of how keenly fought over was this corner of the Island during the German rearguard withdrawal to the mainland. The Messina naval yards were still in ruins, the airport at Reggio (as they drove back across Reggio Calabria towards Catanzaro) still littered

\textsuperscript{55} Diary 2, 30 December 1947. P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.
\textsuperscript{56} At the same time as the brothers were in Sicily, Frank Gigliotti led a National Association of Evangelicals group through the island. He reported: ‘While we were in Italy struggling to see evidence of the new freedom, the Protestant Churches of Italy were being closed, their ministers beaten and their Communion tables desecrated... The fruit of mob violence, agitated by the local Clergy, while the police as representatives of the Italian Government, stood and did absolutely nothing with the exception that they did arrest the Protestants and tried to hold them incommunicado, until we protested.’ Letter from F. Gigliotti to J. Hickerson, Assistant Secretary of State, May 8, 1950, Italian Persecution Folder, Flower Pentecostal Heritage Center Archives.
with ‘scores of German planes, all smashed.’\(^{57}\) They were relieved to be back in Catanzaro, where they linked up again with De Lucia, and (in meetings) the 200 young people who they hoped would form the core of a viable YFC branch. The trip back to Cosenza was a form of confirmation as to the effectiveness of their ministry – De Lucia (from Cosenza) and Mirabelli (from Luzzi) both attested to having been converted in their Naples services. In 1948 the former travelled to the USA to study for ministry in Minneapolis; the latter was elected President of the fledgling YFC in Italy.

After fare-welling family and holding services around Cosenza, on 20 January the brothers received a cable indicating that Torrey Johnson and George Wilson would be in Rome on the 26th. Back up through Portici, stopping again at the Casa Materna, and to the Hotel Turistico in Naples they drove. In Naples, they checked their visa status with the American Consulate, to find intense interest by their case officer (a Mr Blue) in whether they had ‘seen or met up with any discrimination in Italy. We had a chance to tell him plenty of what we had both seen and heard.’\(^{58}\) Not only were the brothers carrying the personal observations and stories from their contacts, they were directly dealing with the dire situation in which De Lucia and others found themselves once they left Catholic orders: ‘they need help badly.’ Almost without knowing it, the brothers became contributors to the development of American policy. Within a year, the Italian Assemblies of God (or ADI) was formed and, by consistent pressure from Washington, won historic freedoms under a direct agreement with the new Italian Republic. It would grow to become the largest Pentecostal denomination in Western Europe.

Arriving in Rome, they preached in the church of Roberto Bracco—himself a serial victim of Fascist oppression, and a major figure in the early ADI—drawing 300 to services that saw numbers of confessions of faith. The next day, services drew over 500, and the brothers found themselves faced with a stream of visitors – pastors, youth leaders and ex-priests. Johnson and Wilson were delayed in Switzerland, leaving the brothers to labour on for a few more days – something that turned out for the best. By the time the senior YFC figures arrived, meetings in Bracco’s church were at flood tide: not only was seeing Johnson ‘almost

\(^{57}\) Diary, 13 January 1948. P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.

\(^{58}\) Diary, 22 January 1948. P. and L. Palermo Collection, BGA, Wheaton College.
like going home,’ but ‘Torrey got blessed’ in the services, and promptly wired home for $700.00 in order to expand their work. The wife of an American GI (Mrs. Johnson) even responded to an appeal for salvation: ‘God does it again,’ chortled Phil, convinced that the evident value of working in Italy must have been driven home on Johnson and Wilson. Spiritual might be their objectives, but they were also Americans, and endlessly results-driven.

Johnson toured the sites of their developments, met the newly appointed leaders of the YFC in Italy, and addressed ‘mass rallies’ with the Palermo brothers in Naples, including in the ‘beautiful auditorium’ of the National Academy of Music.\(^{59}\) There was not doubt as to the difference between the evangelists and the religious statesman – quite in contrast to the homestays that typified their own travels, Johnson stayed in ‘the most beautiful sweet of rooms’ (sic) in Rome. In Naples the American Consulate held out good hopes that the De Lucia could migrate to America, and the Mayor (then the scholarly lawyer, Giuseppe Buonocore) publicly praised YFC at one of their rallies. Even so, Johnson’s mind was not on the Palermo Brothers’ ‘forgotten front’ in the spiritual war. His thoughts were on the strategic level, on the YFC’s great gamble, the World Congress on Evangelism, to be held in conjunction with Martin Niemoeller in Beatenberg, Switzerland in August. He wanted his ‘Youth for Christ International Evangelists’ back in the USA promoting this, and the YFC’s plan to put a mass rally in every county in the mainland United States.\(^{60}\) In the UK, moreover, Livermore was requesting their presence in Britain for a two-month tour, despite the brothers’ opinion that there was more to be done in Italy.\(^{61}\) A couple of days after he left Italy, Johnson cabled the brothers: instead of staying in Italy until the end of March, so as to link to the London Youth for Christ Conference (31 March – 4 April), he directed them to drive to Monte Carlo, where they would work in France for a week, before returning home. The order was made the more embarrassing by the fact that the YFCI had not cabled additional funds, leaving the brothers

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\(^{59}\) George Wilson, ‘Appointment in Europe,’ Youth for Christ Magazine, April 1948, 23.

\(^{60}\) International World Congress Rally [brochure], in PA: Palermo, Phil and Louis, Vol. V, BGA.

without the wherewithal to pay their hotel bill in Rome. After settling, they drove north, avoided being car-jacked by highway robbers on the way to Florence, met up with the mothers and families of war-brides and friends who had moved to America (including Pietro Menconi’s sister), many of whom were in dire financial situations. In Genoa, they could hardly drive through the streets for the tens of thousands of young people marching under the Red Flag. In the light of that, their 300 at the local Baptist church seemed like small beer. Leaving the door to the church open, however, ‘even some of the Commies who had been on parade came into the meeting. It was decided to have another meeting tomorrow night. Amen.’ When it came time to leave, ‘people hated to see us leave Italy, anxious for us to return.’ Nevertheless, sending Louie’s accordion back to Rome (French customs would not allow it across the border), they headed for Monte Carlo on 10 February. They left behind a fledgling YFC organization with over 1000 members, in three key cities.

On August 8 1948 the brothers took advantage of the Beatenberg Conference to go south for a ‘second invasion’ of Italy. They were thrilled to see the work continuing, the songs they had taught on the last tour still in circulation. On the first tour, they had plastered every town with oversized posters. In preparation for their meeting in Rome on 11 September, they dropped 60,000 flyers over the city by plane, advertising Oswald J. Smith’s preaching and ‘The Miracle of Youth for Christ... the Christian movement that covers the world.’ Despite being blockaded by thousands of youth in the city to celebrate Catholic Action’s 80th anniversary, Smith’s preaching and the brothers’ music had the desired effect. In Naples, the press for free bibles was so great that Phil described it as ‘almost a riot’: they spent nearly two weeks after the rally dealing with the aftereffects of rallies and ‘gospel bombs’ dropped from the sky. Then it was Cosenza and Catanzaro again, on to Taranto and Bari, then back to Naples before arriving back in the USA in the first week of November. They left behind a reinforced Italian YFC (the Gioventu per Cristo, or GPC), with four full time workers in a national office in Naples. They came back to a presidential race in which they were publicly supporting Truman, as the administration that would

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support the continued Marshall Plan for a desperate Italy threatened by communism.

On their return, the brothers took over YFC in Minneapolis, which, under George Wilson, became the center for the massive expansion of Billy Graham Organisation and YFCI activities. On the one hand these kept them too busy to return to Italy, and on the other, their association with neo-Evangelicalism antagonized some of their earlier, more fundamentalist supporters. Harvey Springer, the ‘cowboy evangelist,’ cancelled their meetings in his Colorado church when they started to write to him on YFC letterhead. Their work in POW camps and in Italy (where they had walked along Salerno beaches and military graveyards marked by thousands of white crosses) had left them with a deep compassion for American servicemen. Over the next 37 years they would find themselves often on the ‘Bob Hope Trail.’ ‘Spaghetti Spectaculars’—dinner/evangelism events where the brothers would cook while preaching to church groups and non-Christians—became a mainstay. These expanded from dinners in homes, first locally and then ‘all over the country,’ as people ‘came to Christ regularly at our spaghetti and pizza dinners.’ From 1960, at the invitation of David Breese, YFC Director in Chicago, these became a regular means of reaching out to youth. They both sang, and Louie played the accordion or—being a talented ventriloquist—would project the barking of a dog under distance locations, and fool young people to come and help him find it, creating the opportunity for chaos and laughter.

Spaghetti, accordion music and other Italian stereotypes, then, were a regular element in the evangelism of these ‘apostles of cheer.’ They would make fun of their own accents, their culture, or their height (featuring, for example, in photos with basketball players, or the statuesque Cliff Barrows). Ironically, it was this ability to turn the hidden penalties of the American inculturation process (ie. nationalism) into positives which made them effective on one side of the Atlantic, while on the other side effectiveness lay in their ability to translate between American and Italian cultures (ie. inter-nationalism). They became adept at being ‘all things to all men,’ while not losing who they essentially were. They thus formed close relationships with the various spinoff organisations, which owed much to the Graham Organisation,

61 H. Springer to P. Palermo, 26 March 1948, Palermo Collection, BGA.
such as Gospel Films and the various athletes’ chaplaincies under William Judson ‘Billy’ Zeoli, a close confidante of President Gerald Ford. From 1965-1971, they were regular visitors to Vietnam, working among the troops and local churches. Though their Italian-American jokes didn’t translate well, they were ‘good sports,’ and adjusted fluidly to playing in places without electricity and which did not ‘get’ their enculturated form of evangelism. In the 1960s and 1970s, they released a number of albums. It was not until 1971 that they could return to Italy.

They had not lost touch with what was happening there, however. When the brothers were sent on tour for YFC—as they were to Racine, Wisconsin (10 April) or Vermilion Valley, California (12 May)—they repeated their stories of revival in Italy, of ex-priests coming to belief in Christ. Robert Cook (for YFCI) encouraged them to travel with Ugo De Lucia and ‘throw the book’ at the American churches with regard to missions and ‘uncork everything in true Palermo fashion.’ They didn’t need encouraging. A newsletter of July 1948 recalls to those who had witnessed their return tour:

Many of you heard our reports—we trust your hearts were challenged and burdened for these people who are destitute, hungry, weary in body, but most of all, starving for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because of the political situation, it looked almost as though Italy would go behind the Iron Curtain of communism. However, under the providence of God Italy was spared that, thus giving us the opportunity to preach the Gospel to those people in that needy land.

In 1957, Zondervan published their story under the title Life with the Palermos. They used such stories to raise money for YFC Italy and stir organisations (such as British YFC, or the students of Bethel College) into ‘mission mindedness’ for Europe. They also connected to Italian

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64 Charlotte Stemple, My Vietnam: Stories of the War Years from the Inside Out (LaVergne, Tenn.: Xulon Press, 2010), 129.
66 R. A. Cook to P. Palermo, 19 May 1949, BGA.
67 L. & P. Palermo, to ‘Dear Christian Friends’ (circular), 30 July 1948, BGA.
68 E. Hutchings to L & P Palermo, 18.9.1950, BGA; ‘Spire’: Bethel College Yearbook, 1951, BGA.
speakers in the USA — many of whom could hardly read or write in their own language before the Palermos put the Bible in their hands — understanding their struggles with doctrine and the inroads of the ‘testimonio di Geova.’ They continued to send aid packages to many of those whom they had met — to Elia Libonati, for example, in Genova, who in November 1948 wrote to thank them for a packet of clothes and food they had sent over.69

The Palermo brothers emerged as evangelists at a very specific time when American society was exposed to change and internationalization as never before. The extreme mobility associated with first Depression, then recovery and rearmament, followed by the mass people flows associated with War, provided a new audience for inventive evangelists. Emerging out of poverty with marketable music and performance skills, they were prepared to do anything, go anywhere, to extend the evangelical culture, which accepted and empowered them. Like many better-known Italian performers of their time, they were able to use an Italian identity that was in the process of being made ‘safe’ through domestication, while at the same time remaining an essential ‘otherness.’ This was so both in and outside the emerging evangelical mainstream organized through the National Association of Evangelicals. Their ethnicity and playful musicality hid their real point of difference — their origins in the Pentecostal subculture of the Assemblea Cristiana— while also providing them with a pathway out of Melrose Park. They brought this different sameness to the (decreasingly Swedish) Evangelical Free Church — out of which their wives came, in which their first sponsors were found, and in which Torrey Johnson’s own family had their roots. Having attached themselves to the urban missions in the mid-1930s, by the 1940s they were well-placed to be caught up in the rapid expansion of Torrey Johnson’s influential ministry, first (and for 37 years) as Youth For Christ Missionaries, and then in the global endeavours of post-war American evangelicalism. Along the way, they found the cultural attitudes, spiritual technologies, and musical skills gifted to them by their Melrose Park upbringing to be of great value. They also found that identity was a flexible category: they were more Italian than they thought when they left Melrose Park for America, and more American than they thought when they left Minneapolis for Co-

It was perhaps this latter which enabled them to respond flexibly - both when Johnson redirected their efforts at the end of their Italian tour in February 1948, and later when they travelled extensively - often on the coat-tails of America's wars - for YFC, World Vision and other globalizing agencies. In the words of Charlotte Stemple, they were ‘good sports,’ able to tone down the sharp edges of American evangelicalism when they found themselves in cross-cultural situations, able to put response to the gospel first. There is no doubt that they were overshadowed by the great and the famous, that their passion for Italy became a ‘forgotten front’ in the great crusade. As a footnote in American post-war Evangelical history, however, they remind scholars that the origins of evangelicalism in trans-Atlantic migration extended for longer than many perhaps have thought, and that marginalized elements of the story can provide important insights into the context of modern developments.