

Traditions

Other than that the Latin-rite Catholic Church, Italy has two more native churches: the Italo-Albanian Catholic Church, one of the twenty-two Eastern Catholic Churches in communion with the Pope, and the Waldensian Evangelical Church, a Christian movement originated from Lyon in the late 12th century and turned Calvinist denomination since the Protestant Reformation (see also: Waldensians). The two churches include the majority of the population in Piana degli Albanesi, Sicily and Lungro, Calabria, and the so-called “Waldensian Valleys” (Val Pellice, Val Chisone and Valle Germanasca) of western Piedmont, respectively.

Most historical or, to borrow an American term, mainline Protestants, including the Waldensians (30,000 members), the Baptists (Baptist Evangelical Christian Union of Italy, 20,000), the mostly German-speaking Lutherans (Lutheran Evangelical Church in Italy, 7,000), the Methodists (Methodist Evangelical Church in Italy, 5,000) and minor Calvinist and Presbyterian communities, are affiliated to the Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy, along with the Italian section of The Salvation Army and some minor Evangelical and Pentecostal denominations. In the Protestant context, it is also worth mentioning the Evangelical Christian Church of the Brethren (21,000) and the Italian section of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (20,000).

Italy is home to around 45,000 Jews, who are one of the most ancient Jewish communities in the world. The Jewish presence dates to the pre-Christian Roman period and has continued, despite periods of extreme persecution and expulsions from parts of the country from time to time, until the present. Native Italian Jews, who form the core of the community in Rome, practice the Italian rite, but there are also Ashkenazi Jews, who have settled in the North, especially in the lands of the former Republic of Venice (Veneto, Friuli-Venezia Giulia and eastern Lombardy) and Piedmont, since the late Middle Ages, and Sephardi Jews, who have established themselves mostly in Livorno, Florence, Venice and several cities of Emilia, after their expulsion from the Kingdom of Naples. The Jewish community of Milan, the country’s second largest after Rome’s, is the most international in character and composition, notably including a substantial number of Mizrahi Jews originating from the Middle East. The twenty-one Jewish local communities are affiliated to the Union of Italian Jewish Communities, which

counts 25,000 members.

Immigration and future scenarios

Immigration has brought to Italy many religious minorities, especially Islam and Eastern and Oriental Orthodoxy. By the numbers, in 2015 the country was home to around 1,850,000 Muslims and virtually 1,700,000 Orthodox Christians. Among the latter, it is especially relevant the Romanian Orthodox Church, which has a diocese of Italy, and the Greek Orthodox Church (Ecumenical Patriarchate of Constantinople), whose Archdiocese of Italy and Malta and Exarchate of Southern Europe has its see in Venice. Massimo Introvigne, founder and director of CESNUR (an Italian think tank devoted to religious studies) and main author of *L'enciclopedia delle religioni in Italia*, predicts that, thanks to continued immigration from Eastern Europe, Orthodox Christians could soon become the country's second largest religious group, overtaking Muslims.

Also Protestantism, especially in its evangelical and Pentecostal forms, is on the rise: Introvigne recalls how Giorgio Bouchard, a Waldensian pastor, told him that “when he was born, the typical Italian Protestant was a man, lived in Piedmont, had a last name like Bouchard and was a Waldensian”, while “today, the typical Italian Protestant believer is a woman, lives in Campania or Sicily, is named Esposito and is a Pentecostal”. Not surprisingly the Assemblies of God in Italy (150,000 members), the Federation of Pentecostal Churches (50,000) and several smaller evangelical/Pentecostal denominations have the majority of their communities in the South. Additionally, several foreign-born churches, especially African initiated churches, most of which evangelical and/or Pentecostal, are taking roots in the country, especially in the North.

Among the fastest-growing new religious denominations in Italy a special place is held by the Jehovah's Witnesses (who count around 420,000 faithful, including both members and other people regularly attending the Congregation's meetings). Then, come four faiths professed mainly by immigrants: Buddhists (260,000), Hindus (180,000), Sikhs (150,000) and Latter-day Saints (26,000). According to Caritas Italiana (the CEI's charitable arm), in 2015 the immigrant population was 53.8% Christian (30.5% Orthodox, 18.3% Catholic, 4.3% Protestant and 0.7% other), 32.2% Muslim, 2.9% Hindu and 2.2% Buddhist. According to the same source, in 2012 Italy was home to 850 “African Neo-

Pentecostal churches”, 750 foreign-language Catholic communities, 655 mosques or other Islamic houses of worship, 355 Orthodox parishes, 126 Buddhist temples, 37 Sikh ones and 2 Hindu ones. The Mosque of Rome is one of the largest outside Muslim world.