

GO TELL THE STORY:
A NARRATIVE OF SHORT DOCUMENTARIES
COMPARING AMERICA'S SPIRITUAL ICONOGRAPHY OF ITALY
WITH THE REALITY OF ITALIAN CULTURE

by
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To the reader: As you may well notice, this thesis is very different from an expected research thesis. While I did conduct anthropological social research, my method of recovering the facts and translating them is indeed through video, not writing. My only hope is that in reading this you are nearly able to finish reading before going to the website, as that is my ultimate goal.

This incredible opportunity would not have been possible without the support of so many people, but first, there is one person who was the forerunner in supporting me. Not only was he the first person to make me feel this research was valued, but he was the first to put his money towards it. Professor Broxon Sears has been a motivation for me through this journey and I can't thank him enough for that support.

Dr. Ronald Pitcock deserves every acknowledgment, as without him this, nor the future plans of taking this research to Thailand, would have been possible. I have put in more hours sitting in his office as a counselee than I have put into my classes, though he'd chastise me for saying so. His effect on my life will surely be a lasting one. His entire family has taken me in and I've learned that is an invaluable tool for building people up, allowing them to belong.

Professor Aaron Chimble has shown me more kindness and grace than I deserve, and he has continually pushed me to be better. He knows my work and capabilities and his refusal to allow anything but my best has been the best

encouragement I could have ever hoped for. Aside from that, he is one of the toughest graders around, I've learned to love and accept my B...plus.

This is all to the glory of God, for whom all work is created and by whom it will be finished, including me. Colossians 3:23.

INTRODUCTION

With a generous donation from my grandparents and a pile of cash saved up from refusing movies and Chick-fil-a runs, I had saved up enough money to go to Precision camera and purchase a Canon Rebel T-31 with a 17-85mm lens, a fixed Rhode mic and a couple of SD cards. It was a mere week before I left for Italy and as I pulled out of Precision's parking lot the possibility that lay ahead left me in a daze. Unfortunately I pulled directly into the passenger side of an oncoming car, so I was shaken from the fog rather quickly. I should have seen the foretelling of the paralleled adventure that was to ensue, but I was just focused on keeping my parents from taking away the stipend they'd just offered.

On January 24th, 2012 I landed in Italy and was picked up by Simone Tse, my great friend from my first trip to Italy, and two missionary friends. They parked the car and we began to set out looking for my hotel. All four of us had one of my suitcases to bear, Matt Walton switched off with Simone pulling my bag that I had learned a day before weighed 90 pounds, one 400 dollar overweight charge and I was cursing that extra coat and five pairs of shoes I'd shoved in.

We dragged the mammoth bags through the cobble stone streets for 45 minutes before finding my lodgings. I asked the front desk attendant where TCU students were to sign in, an admittedly dumb question because there was merely one small room furnished by an obtrusively large desk to which visitors obviously checked in. She looked to Simone, ignoring the American with a brave but faulty grip

of the Italian language, and informed him that students were to arrive a day later and that there was no pre-assigned lodging for me. After a few minutes of frantic calls and price finagling I found myself alone in Florence, having no idea when to expect the other students, and very anxious to get out of my 13-hour flight clothes. This was the start of my adventure.

PERSONAL NARRATIVE OF RESEARCH

I had intended to spend my time in Italy getting a greater command of the language and filming as many students, missionaries, and religious leaders in interviews that would lead to answering the greatest question I'd had since my first visit to Italy: If this country is the birthplace of Catholicism, the only country technically ruled by Catholicism, why did all of the Italian people claim to be atheists? All the people I had met anyways. And greater yet, why were American missionaries living there and if it were such a hopeless crisis as I'd recognized in my first visit, why didn't more American people know about it, and how could I let them know?

Though some of my closest friends were studying abroad with me, I felt my mission was to be separate from them for most of my journey. Thus, I spent my days walking around alone, camera in hand, filming anything I thought might lead to asort of proof to what I just knew to be true after so many conversations with Italians.

I woke up around seven o'clock most days and would take my time walking to class to see the city at a different hour than most would have the chance. I watched store keepers open businesses, street cleaners do their jobs. I recognized the garbage truck drivers to be well dressed and learned they had university degrees, but not enough connections or money to find a fitting job.

I met store keepers who worked seven days a week and had taken two days off in the past 365. I met chefs who made some of the world's finest cuisine but spent their days making pastries at a coffee bar in order to make ends meet. I saw countless homeless Romanian women called "gypsies" prepare the stoop they would claim for the day as their home; women who sat on the streets and ran a business of asking people for money. I began to know one who sat on the curb on my way to school and began to make her lunch everyday. In four months I could never get her to say a word to me amidst all my attempts.

I went to university areas and just watched the students and tried to listen to conversation. I was given the middle finger and more than a few dirty looks as I would film people just walking by, but to me, the look on their faces did more to tell a culture's story than most interviews.

I attended an Italian evangelical church and joined their Bible study. I helped cook and tried, so hard, to understand the discussion in a language I was desperate to become fluent in. I rode behind missionaries on their Vespas and walked for hours with my new Italian language partner, Ale, who also happened to be a lawyer in Florence.

I began having late dinners and attending house parties with Ale and we quickly became close friends as I spent many nights with her and her friends.

I recognize that half a year in any country can't give you a full understanding of its people but once I felt I could understand implications in speech and what questions to ask, I began doing interviews.

At first I interviewed only American missionaries and asked general questions like "what is the spiritual climate in Italy?" and "why are there American missionaries?"

I spent my weekends traveling to other cities to do interviews with anyone I could get a connection with, and often just to see a new city alone.

I moved to interviewing Italians that I knew, starting with Simone and a member of his family. Then a few Italian missionaries and pastors and finally I lost all decency and began rogue interviewing in piazzas with anyone who wasn't offended by my inquiries.

I refused to watch American movies (I caved over spring break while in Vienna, it was the Hunger Games, I can't be held responsible) and ate what I thought would be considered authentic, going as far as ordering anchovies on a pizza.

Emphasis on the ordering...they never made it to my mouth.

I felt I'd done my homework.

I began to make connections with other people who would ask their friends to do interviews with me. A friend of Ale's introduced me to a prominent religion

specialist who was given a fellowship to study and give lectures in Italy. His interview started as well as it ended, his watch, which belonged to his great grandfather, inexplicably fell from his wrist and shattered as he shook my hand hello. The entire interview I felt I had learned more about Italian religion than I had the entire time. He gave me the history, current issues and political theory behind Italian religious climate and then in the most brilliant manner offended everything I was doing and hoped to do. It was radical. He then left without as much as paying for his coffee. I decided not to feature his interview on my website because, for one, he was a terribly boring speaker and for another reason, the audio and lighting was horrendous. But I listened to his interviews and wrote every word he said...then listened to it again and realized how he had negated the foundation of what I believe. That interview allowed me to learn that I could respond to biased researchers patronizing me in a way that allowed me to maintain my dignity and still learn eagerly.

With only a few days to go until May 24, when I was to return to America, I found myself living at Ale's apartment. Having turned down a summer job in Italy, I was disappointed to leave but knew I would not be able to sort through all of my findings until I separated myself from its people.

It took me a month to begin combing through the hundreds of hours of footage I'd gathered. Quickly, I realized one problem. There was no way I could make a cohesive documentary. As is with life, peoples' stories don't always weave neatly together to make a compelling argument or even a story. Especially not one

that has a good shot to “show and not tell” every detail. I knew I had learned and researched so much about the culture, specifically with how they viewed God, but I was less sure about how to show that.

I began watching all of my interviews and transcribing every word. Within the first interview, Simone’s, I couldn’t hold in what I found and began to write. I wrote an article trying to show a fraction of the religious iconography of Italy against the true lack of belief. The article was published in World Magazine, and I was no farther with the documentary, but I finally had something down on paper.

I decided that each interview told enough of its own story and slowly, I began to edit them. Each took me around a month. Finding the b-roll was the most difficult part, I didn’t have enough to match each person.. I had to decide to humble myself to my own expectations of having a really great short narrative and focused on what they were saying and what that implied about their culture.

I then created a website called “Go Tell the Story” to use as the platform to show these short narratives. In all, they tell a fraction of the story of the spiritual climate of their culture, and the lack of hope that rests uneasy on each Italian soul.

Translating the interviews took the most time, so I decided to only do one interview in Italian. The rest, I watched and used to gain greater understanding.

I decided that six videos was enough to publish a site, though I still had more than 40 that I could edit and use. Again, the point was not to make me look qualified

or well researched but rather to tell the story of a culture that is believed to have invented the Catholic religion, and has no idea who the savior of that religion is.

My goal was indeed to tell their story, and create a platform that I could continue to use, as I see Italy as only a piece of the puzzle to the true solution to this world and its problems.

CONCLUSION (CALL TO ACTION)

Though I am a journalist, I had no intention of leaving out my beliefs because I don't recognize my religious beliefs as biases, but rather truth. I am so convinced that Jesus Christ is the son of God and was sent to this world to redeem his people, that I believe telling others that the truth is, He is the only way to hope. In the Bible Jesus promises that He will return but first, every tribe tongue and nation will hear of His glory and will have the opportunity to turn from darkness of sin to the light that saves. I see Go Tell the Story.org as a way to advance his coming. Truly, that is my goal.

I don't intend to call out a culture or a religion and deem them unclean or more sinful than another. Rather, I have a specific love and interest in Italy, which is why I began to learn the language as a freshman in college and continue to teach the language today. It devastates me that Italy is considered a "saved" country and thus unworthy of churches to send missionaries to in order to present to them the life saving truth of the gospel. It is this stereotype I want to adjust. The Italian people do

not consider themselves to be Christians and none that I have ever talked to outside of the church had ever heard the entire gospel.

The book is not closed for me on Italy, I continue to try to market the website so that others might see and possibly do something about it, whether it's praying or going. I began by asking 50 friends to look at the site. I asked them to comment on the site and share it with their friends. Many of them responded back with kind words of encouragement, however only seven comments made their way to the page within the week.

Next, I chose to send it to pastors and church's I knew. Sadly, only one pastor responded, my personal missions pastor, and it was an email as opposed to the requested on-site comment. That was a common mistake and certainly nothing to note with disappointment.

Lastly, I sent notices and emails and requests for a story pitch to multiple Christian news sites, blogs, and shows. I'd previously written for two of them. I am still receiving responses from those media and look forward to feedback.

My next step is to continue with Go Tell the Story in Thailand as I leave in October as a Fulbright scholar. I will teach English and am currently raising funds to buy more cameras. My goal is to now empower the Thai people to tell their OWN stories. I will start a film class where I will teach them how they can film and tell their stories through the use of video. Then together, we will edit and translate their footage so they will have an opportunity to practice English in a more in-depth way.

I want to not only tell peoples' stories but empower and encourage them to tell their own. In the same way, I hope to encourage others to find stories that they might like to tell.

Everyone has a story and God is knitting all of our stories together to unfold to His greater one. I implore you to look around your own culture as if you were stepping anew into a country abroad and recognize the stories around you. Then, I urge you to GO....tell the story.

ABSTRACT

This study is focused on cultural anthropological research conducted over four months of in person Interviews done in both Italian and English. The interviews are to be conducted entirely in Italy and will range from Italians to Americans, Africans and French answering questions about personal spiritual, religious and relational beliefs. Conclusions are not to be drawn before the interview process is finished. Upon return to the United States, all footage will be reviewed and translated and edited into short narrative documentaries and placed on a website platform to be called "Go Tell the Story." Website viewers are to come to their own personal conclusions about the spiritual climate of Italy and its effect on the Italian culture. Personal conclusions will be presented through the thesis presentation and a written reflection of the personal journey will be used as the written thesis.