

# Bertola, Romualdo

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Romualdo Bertola was a pioneering Italian evangelist in the late 1800s.

Romualdo Bertola was an Italian Adventist businessman and commercial traveler who was employed by a large publishing house. He traveled on business to all the chief towns in Europe, including the Mediterranean region. As his travels took him to many cities, including places in Turkey, Greece, Malta, and Egypt (Alexandria), he took advantage of this fact to spread the gospel. Thus, it was, that he came as a self-supporting missionary to Alexandria in the spring of 1878. He was already a man of some years at this time. He could not stay a long time in any one location, however, so he did not always see the fruits of his labors.<sup>1</sup>

In 1877, Dr. Herbert P. Ribton and his wife and daughter had been baptized by J. N. Andrews in Naples, Italy. Later, they would personally play an important role in the work in Alexandria. Beginning in 1877, the Adventist church in Naples began sending the French *Signs of the Times* to acquaintances they had among the Italians living in Alexandria, and they corresponded about doctrines. Thus, when Bertola visited in March of 1878, he found fertile ground and stayed for a few months, raising up a church and baptizing seven members on September 29 of that year.<sup>2</sup>

The church in Naples had raised some money to support Bertola's trip, and it is clear that Ribton felt responsible for the work that was started there.<sup>3</sup> The believers in Alexandria met in a hall that belonged to the Scotch church, but after the baptism, the leadership of the mission no longer allowed them to meet there, and they actually persecuted the little flock, calling them robbers, dissenters, seducers, and the like. Reports show that Bertola was calm and kind through all this process, supporting the new believers throughout the attacks on them.

Giuseppe Rupp was one of those baptized. His letter to the *Signs of the Times* immediately following the baptism described the events as "excommunication" from the little Christian community they had been a part of. His plea to the church at large was: "That we may be always ready to defend our faith; pray also for the conversion of our enemies, and do all you can to help us. Send me tracts as quickly as possible."<sup>4</sup>

When Bertola requested money from Naples to rent another hall, Ribton sent it, and Bertola set up an apartment in the hall, intended for the pastor who would come to shepherd the flock. Ribton not only

responded that they would gladly go without their church building in Naples in order to rent a hall for the new believers in Alexandria (which seems to have happened for a time), but he expressed a willingness to be sent to Alexandria to serve, knowing that Bertola could not stay long.

In Bertola's own words,

I shall be obliged to remain here all the month of October, though at a great sacrifice in my business, in order to set everything in order and confirm these dear brethren in their Christian duties; for there are others who have begun to attend our meetings, have accepted the word, and have already asked to be baptized. But after November 1st, it will be absolutely impossible for me to remain any longer.<sup>5</sup>

In 1879, Dr. Ribton went to work in Alexandria, from where he received correspondence from Bertola, who was at that time in Constantinople. Ribton asked that J. N. Andrews help sort out the problems of the church in Naples (which he had left leaderless in order to work in Alexandria), and which also had no place to meet, but he felt they were strong enough in the faith to stand alone without a leader for a time.

Also during 1879, there is word of Bertola working in Greece. He wrote to Dr. Ribton that there were many who kept the Sabbath in Greece and that he hoped to baptize some of them.<sup>6</sup> Ribton wrote of another expected visit from Bertola to Alexandria and how he was looking forward to spending more time evangelizing the Arabs and the Greeks during Bertola's visit, because, working alone, the Italian work took up nearly all his time.<sup>7</sup>

In 1880, Bertola and Ribton, along with a couple of other workers, were invited by J. N. Andrews and J. N. Loughborough to meet Elder White and Elder Haskell for General Conference meetings on the Adventist work in Europe, to be held in Basel, Switzerland.<sup>8</sup>

In 1882 there was political unrest when a dervish named Arabi Pasha came to Alexandria and stirred up trouble, vowing to kill every European in the region. In the anti-foreigner rebellion that followed, Dr. Ribton, Giuseppe Rupp, and another church member named Alligretti were killed, and Ribton's daughter was wounded. This was an exceedingly great blow to the little church in Alexandria. Mrs. Ribton and her daughter Nina fled to Dublin, taking with them the little daughter of Alligretti, who had no other relatives, while Mrs. Rupp went to Malta with other members of the Rupp family.<sup>9</sup>

There is no further record of Bertola's life and work after this event.

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## NOTES

1. H. P. Ribton, "From Egypt," *ARH*, May 17, 1881, 20:316.
2. Giuseppe Rupp, "Important Correspondence," *Signs of the Times* 4 (November 28, 1878), 45:358.
3. H. P. Ribton, "Important Correspondence," *Signs of the Times* 4, November 28, 1878), 45:358.
4. Rupp, "Important Correspondence," 358.
5. Romualdo Bertola, "Important Correspondence," *Signs of the Times*, November 28, 1878, 45:358.
6. H. P. Ribton, "The Message in Alexandria, Egypt," *ARH*, May 15, 1879, 20: 158.
7. H. P. Ribton, "Egypt," *ARH*, August 28, 1879, 10: 76-77.
8. J. N. Andrews, and J. N. Loughborough, "Conference of European Missionaries at Basle," *ARH*, January 29, 1880) 5: 80.
9. M. Oyer, "Particulars of the Death of Dr. Ribton," *ARH*, September 19, 1882, 38: 602.

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