

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 22: Waldensians: Medieval "Evangelicals"

The Waldensians: From the Editor

The Waldensian Motto: Into Darkness, Light

The story of the Waldensians is a story of devotion to the Scriptures, and of perseverance—a story that should inspire us all. Because of their origins in the distant 12th century, they have been called "the oldest evangelical Church"; because they became an embattled pocket of stubborn "heretics" in the valleys of the Piedmont Alps, unwilling to surrender their beliefs, they have been called the "Israel of the Alps." The Waldensian story is fascinating, and legendary.

Only a few books have appeared in English about these Alpine Christians since the last century. If you have read, or heard, about the Waldensians before, you are probably aware that they are viewed as one of the evangelical lights in history before the Reformation, along with Wycliffe and Hus.

They are usually claimed as a pre-protestant Protestant movement. Yet, like these others, they were not enemies of the Catholic Church. They were a small group within the Church who desired a closer adherence to the Scriptures and a more consistent walk after the example of Christ and the Apostles. The Medieval Church was filled with such movements.

Though they were generally regular, faithful members of Catholic services (until the Reformation), they seem to have viewed the worldly Church establishment in its wealth and power as corrupt. They held religious meetings in their homes and had traveling spiritual leaders, the mysterious *barba*, who met with them to instruct them and take their confessions. For such things as these, in times when nonconformity could be an unpardonable sin they became the targets of numerous extermination campaigns. The events surrounding the famous massacre of Waldensians 1655 is a truly gripping drama in Church history.

Medieval movements to get back to Apostolic Christianity were common; it is remarkable, however, that the Waldensians have survived to this day. There were times when the severe persecution of the Inquisition, power-hungry political rulers, and bands of thieving soldiers threatened to erase them from the book of history. Fortunately for the whole Body of Christ this did not happen.

We hope this issue will be a source of strength to you as you read of the perseverance of the Waldensians. They overcame, and it says in Revelation 2:7, "To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life."

Our special thanks to Dr. Giorgio Bouchard, President of the Protestant Federation of Italy, and the other contributors to this issue; to Rev. Frank Gibson of the American Waldensian Society, who helped with this project a great deal, and to Dr. Albert de Lange, who assisted us with the pictures.

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Remembered by Their Enemies

"Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before all men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven."

Matthew 5:15, 16

Most of what we know about the early Waldensians comes from the reports of those who wanted to accuse and eliminate them. These reports have become for us testimonies to a group of Christians who risked all for their beliefs in teaching the Bible, and in living a Christian life. Though persecution became fierce, their opponents did not prevail. The Waldensians have carried their light now for almost 800 years.

A 13th-century "police report" by an inquisitor. Taken from Church archives found in Carcassone, France.

THE POOR OF LYONS HAD THEIR ORIGINS around the year 1170, founded by a certain Lyonese citizen by the name of Vadensius or Valdenses, after whom his followers took their name. The person in question was a rich man but, abandoning all his wealth, he determined to observe a life of poverty and evangelical perfection, as the Apostles. He arranged for the Gospels and some other books of the Bible to be translated in common speech; also some texts of Saints Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory, arranged under titles which he called "sentences," and which he read very often, though without understanding their import. Infatuated with himself, he usurped the prerogatives of the Apostles by presuming to preach the Gospel in the streets, where he made many disciples, and involving them, both men and women, in a like presumption by sending them out, in turn, to preach.

These people, ignorant and illiterate, went about through the towns, entering houses and even churches, spreading many errors round about. They were summoned by the Archbishop of Lyons and forbidden such presumption. But they wished by no means to obey him, cloaking their madness by saying that they must obey God rather than men, since God had commanded the Apostles to preach the Gospel to every creature.

And thus they ended by despising prelates and the clergy, accusing them for being rich and for living a life of ease; whereas they applied to themselves what was said of the Apostles (whose imitators and successors they boldly declared themselves to be) by a false profession of poverty and feigned image of sanctity.

Because of this disobedience and of this presumptuous appropriation of a task which did not pertain to them, they were excommunicated and expelled from their country.

A Report from the Year 1179 by the English Monk Walter Map

WE HAVE SEEN THE WALDENSIANS at the Council of Pope Alexander III, simple and unlearned men, who take their name from that of their leader, one Valdes, a citizen of Lyons They insistently asked that they be granted authorization to preach, regarding themselves as fully capable of such a task, whereas they are hardly qualified by half As the last of many interrogators, I was mocking their request and their doubtful qualifications, limiting myself to some elemental questions ... "Do

you believe in God the Father?" They answered, "We believe." "And in God the Son?" To which they answered, "We believe." "And in God the Holy Ghost?" They answered, "We believe." "And in the Mother of Christ?" They answered, "We believe." [A trap, for in scholastic theology belief could only be applied to the Trinity.] After this last response there went up a roar of ridicule, and they withdrew, covered with disgrace.

These people have no dwelling place, but go around two by two, barefoot and dressed in coarse tunics. They own nothing, sharing everything in common, after the manner of the Apostles. Naked, they follow a naked Christ. Their beginnings are humble in the extreme, for they have not yet much of a following, but if we should leave them to their devices they will end by turning all of us out.

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A Prophet Without Honor

Waldo of Lyons

We know little about the life of Waldo of Lyons, the man who started the Waldensian Movement, other than his social class. He was a wealthy merchant, well integrated into the political community of Lyons, in France—a man of influence, a man of the establishment.

We know nothing of his life after he was cast out of the city, of his last years, or of his death around the year 1217. Everything centers around a few years, perhaps only a few months. Yet, what we do know about Waldo is very significant in understanding the Waldensians and their beliefs and practices.

Approximately in the years 1173–1176 Waldo made some decisions that radically changed his life. **1) He commissioned the translation of several books of the Bible** from Latin into his local dialect, French-Provencal (French was not yet established as a language).

This decision did not meet opposition. According to a document of the time, he even went to Rome with a friend to present this translation to the pope, and received words of appreciation and praise. **2) He abandoned his business and distributed his goods**, reducing himself to a beggar.

This second decision is more unusual. The inspiration for this change is uncertain, but evidently some drastic experience, or experiences, caused Waldo to question the very foundation of his life. According to the different accounts, which are shrouded in legend, his decision may have been as a result of the death of a friend. There is also mentions of his having been deeply moved by the lyrics of a minstrel's song.

Another element in this second decision was a message from the Gospel: Jesus' words to the rich man recorded in Mark 10:22, "IF YOU WISH TO BE PERFECT, SELL WHAT YOU HAVE AND FOLLOW ME." This statement seems to have resolved Waldo's personal crisis, and to have pushed him to his decision. Deciding to follow literally this exhortation, Waldo freed himself of his goods with the conviction of following Jesus.

This Gospel message is fundamental in the experience of Waldo and his friends and must be elaborated. It should be immediately noted that the vow of poverty was not extraordinary in the 12th century, as it might appear today. All those entering a convent took this vow, and the examples of princes, nobles, and other important persons who adopted lives of denial are not uncommon.

However, almost always such a decision was made as a renunciation of the world in order to merit salvation. The vow of poverty is part of a "professional" religious life. Yet Waldo remained a layman.

Poverty for Waldo seems to have been a constructive element of Christian discipleship. When he was called by the pope's representative to clarify his position and to sign a declaration of faith containing the fundamental principles of Christianity, he signed without hesitation, but added, "We have decided to live by the words of the Gospel, essentially that of the Sermon on the Mount, and the Commandments, that is, to live in poverty without concern for tomorrow. But we hold that also those who continue to live their lives in the world doing good will be saved."

3) He determined to preach the Gospel message in public.

This decision is still more significant in defining the experience of Waldo. Actually, he did not limit himself to Scriptural passages, which he had translated, but took high points from these and from his personal experience to appeal to and exhort his contemporaries to repentance and to the way of salvation.

His preaching certainly was not that of the average preacher, presented on Sunday to the congregation. A closer and more recent parallel would be the early Methodist preachers in the slums and countrysides of England and the United States. This preaching, which Waldo considered the direct consequence of his conversion and his call to follow Jesus, was the beginning of conflict and persecution for Waldo and his followers.

Because of his activities, Waldo was expelled from the city of Lyons. It is told that in his last meeting before the archbishop of Lyons, the archbishop severely threatened Waldo and warned him to stop his preaching, to which Waldo's response was, "It is better to obey God than man."

Of course, these are from the words of the Apostle Peter as recorded in Acts 4:19, and spoken to the High Priest who wanted Peter's preaching to cease. And just as in the case with Peter, whose calling was to establish the Church of Jesus Christ on the foundation of God's Word, Waldo was intent on basing his apostolic community not on the usual human structures of his day, but purely on the Gospel. Perhaps this is the episode from which the 14th-century Waldensians took the idea of referring to Waldo as "Peter Waldo."

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An Ancient and Undying Light

The Waldensians from the 12th Century to the Protestant Reformation

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Despite centuries of severe persecution, these Christians from the Italian Alps, through the strength of their commitment to Christ, the Bible, and a life of poverty, maintained their evangelical identity, and faithfully carried the Gospel torch from the 12th century to the Reformation.

The late 12th century in Europe was a time rich in spiritual ferment and in its various expressions of religious experience. It is in this distant, shifting period that an ancient group of evangelical Christians—the Waldensians—first appear in the regions of Lyons (France) and, slightly later, Milan (Italy).

In the earliest days the members of this movement were simply called "The Poor." From their seemingly insignificant beginnings, with the odds against their survival as a distinct group, they did survive, and their difficult journey of faith stands out in history.

More than three centuries would pass before the Waldensians would build their own church buildings and view themselves as outside of the mother church; they would eventually melt into the Protestant Reformation. But until that time in the 16th century, The Poor would live as a scattered but closely knit movement within the Roman Church, with a central devotion to Christ, the Scriptures, and a life of poverty in conformity to the example of the Apostles.

In the context of their turbulent time, the emergence of the Waldensian Movement was not exceptional. What is surprising is their survival for such a long period of time. Far from being welcomed by the Church authorities, the Waldensians were harshly repressed. (As opposed to the case, for example, of the great monastic founder Francis of Assisi [1181–1226] and his followers—whose ideas were quite similar in spirit and intention with those of the Waldensians.)

In light of this, the fact that during three centuries the movement of The Poor was able not only to survive but to expand, always attracting new adherents and bringing its testimony into new areas, merits our recognition and special consideration.

Why the Waldensians?

Where can we turn to find an explanation for this success? To the strength of the convictions of single believers? This does not seem to be the case, for in the same period there were other believers just as fervent, of whom every trace has been lost, often cancelled by repression. No, conviction of faith, courage in the face of persecution, and force of spirit do not provide in themselves a satisfactory explanation for the survival of the Waldensians.

We might turn instead (and recent historians have) to reasons of a social and economic nature. Perhaps, since they were simple believers from the most humble classes on the fringe of society, the Waldensians did not constitute a threat to the establishment. They could, therefore, conduct their underground existence without any great risk.

However, this interpretation of the Waldensian phenomenon is contradicted by the evidence: the documentation shows that the Waldensians were present and active in *all* social classes, in the countryside and in the cities, among farmers and among merchants.

Our answer to the mystery of Waldensian survival and growth is of a different nature: ***The movement of The Poor was able to survive the Middle Ages because it never closed itself with a sectarian spirit (that is, it did not see itself as an exclusive group, spiritually superior to other Christians); rather, it knew how to continuously renew itself spiritually and theologically.*** This was possible because, though their social structure and their way of life might change, from their time of origin the Waldensians had a clear and original message to which they held firmly, and to which they remained faithful.

We could say that the Waldensian strength can be found exactly in certain terms we have used so far in referring to them: they were a ***movement***, and a movement of ***the poor***.

Waldo of Lyons and Waldensian Beginnings

These essential Waldensian characteristics already appear clearly in the experience of the founder of the movement, Waldo of Lyons [*see A Prophet Without Honor*]. This merchant, who lived in the French city at the end of the 12th century, did not intend to give life to a new community that would oppose the Church. He did not intend to found a sect, nor to gather around himself a faithful group to carry his name and espouse his ideas. He did not present himself as a preacher with new ideas, new revelations, or particular interpretations to communicate (something which has occurred frequently in the history of the Christian Church).

He had but one purpose: ***to live the Christian faith according to the teaching of the Gospel***; or, to express it in terms closer to the spirituality of his time, ***to follow Jesus as the apostles did***.

He wanted to relive the experience of Jesus' first disciples. And in this sense we can apply to Waldo and his followers the curious and fascinating definition used at a later time by an inquisitor who was intent on persecuting the Waldensians: they were ***Nudi nudum Christum sequentes*** (naked disciples of a naked Christ). The unusual (and to us probably startling) use here of the adjective "naked" can be understood in two ways: with nothing on—that is ***materially poor***, and also, without religious extras, in the sense of ***Christ only***. For the Waldensians, Christ was to be followed in his poverty, and also as the ***only reference point for faith***.

Following Jesus as the apostles did involved certain things for Waldo and his followers. They emphasized the importance of hearing and understanding the Word of God—the Bible; it was from the Scriptures that men and women would know Christ as the center of their faith. They lived in voluntary poverty and were persistent in their intent to preach in public. This last activity was the one that particularly offended the religious leaders of their time, and which brought the wrath of the Catholic Church down upon them.

The archbishop of Lyons attempted to stop Waldo from his public preaching. When he found he could not, he expelled him from the city. Already a group of friends had gathered around Waldo who were devoted to following his example. They did not call themselves "brothers" or "disciples," as was commonly done in the monastic orders in those days, but referred to themselves as Waldo's "co-members," and to their group as a "society." They took these terms from the business language of the time and not from the religious; it is as if they feared that other Christians would think that they were claiming to found a new religious association superior to the existing Church. They wanted only to be a group of laypersons who were collaborating for a precise goal: in this case, ***to preach the Gospel***. This dedication to preaching provoked a strong reaction from the Church, which led to a search for The Poor of Lyons and to their excommunication as heretics.

By Whose Authority?

It will be helpful here to refer to the Church's theology at the time. Public preaching, according to the medieval theologians, was reserved for the clergy. They were, as the successors to the apostles, and in virtue of their ordination, the **only** ones qualified to exercise this ministry. (This notion of apostolic authority being passed down from generation to generation by ordination in the Church is called **Apostolic Succession**.) So according to Church belief and practice at the time, Waldo the merchant, not being ordained, was not a successor of the apostles, and therefore did not have the right to preach.

Now this is precisely the idea that Waldo contested. He, as one who had called upon the Lord, affirmed that he was called to be a disciple of Christ, even as were the apostles. And who are the **real** successors of the apostles? Not necessarily those who are ordained, he argued, but rather **those who respond to the Lord's call and live like the apostles** of old. What makes one a true heir to the apostles is not ordination, but fidelity to God's word. Authority to preach did not come through the visible Church order, but by Christ himself.

The consequences of such a belief as this would have been enormous for the Church in Waldo's time, for the Medieval Church believed that it was the exclusive channel through which God administered his Spirit. If Waldo's idea had been accepted, the Church could not have been looked upon as the sole depository of the Spirit. Waldo believed that God's Word and his Spirit do surely act in the Church, but **are not solely administered by it**.

Probably Waldo did not realize the radical implications of his affirmations, and he continued to feel in full communion with the church, with its tradition, and with all believers. However, the Roman curia (i.e., the Catholic Church government) recognized the danger and after a few years the Poor of Lyons were considered heretics, thus starting their long call to martyrdom.

Against the Donation of Constantine

In the 13th century, especially at its beginning, The Poor were present in Languedoc and Lombardy, that is, Northern Italy (where they were called **The Poor of Lombardy**). A century later the inquisitors found numerous communities in the Danube Valley in Austria, and in Northern Germany. Already in these periods there appeared an organization, divided into small groups with certain individuals responsible for the care of each group. (In some cases the terms of the official church were even used for these leaders, such as apostle, or prefect.) These various small groups, to a certain degree, were independent, and able to pursue their particular vision of the religious life.

Formally, however, the Waldensians continued to be a part of the Roman Church, where they baptized their children and took communion at least once a year, as was the common practice. They were still within the boundaries of the Church of Rome, and they did nothing that would highlight their criticisms of the Church.

Essentially two things distinguished them from those around them:

1) Before everything else they sought an absolute fidelity to the words of Jesus, in particular to the Sermon on the Mount. Consequently **they rejected any form of violence**. Not only did they oppose the violence of war and particularly that of the Crusades, but they also opposed "legal" violence, the kind practiced by the courts.

2) **They refused to take oaths** (based on Matthew 5:33–37), and opposed the practice of lending money at interest. These positions not only stirred reactions from the religious establishment, but the political powers also came to view the Waldensians as dangerous rebels also.

What was the Waldensian motivation for such radicalism? Harsh moral standards, a desire for purity, and coherence with the Gospel? This has often been the explanation. Weren't the Waldensians just simple people, without influential persons in their ranks, merely trying their best to interpret the Gospel and follow it as best they could? This does not appear to be the case.

To be accurate, the Waldensians were in fact not naive, simplistic interpreters of the Scriptures, but they had an acute understanding of the place of Christian faith in history. They believed that the Church, when it is faithful to its true calling, follows in the steps of the apostles. They also knew that the Church can be unfaithful—and that this infidelity shows itself when Christ's spirit of humility and poverty are abandoned for the worldly quest for temporal riches and power. They were convinced that when the Church becomes a worldly power it loses its spirit. The strength of their interpretation came through their pinpointing the moment in history in which they believed this betrayal took place: the 4th century, when Christianity was consecrated as the state religion by the emperor Constantine. That event (which is generally considered a great victory) was in reality, according to the Waldensians, the beginning of the Church's decline; it was a compromise with the world.

"We," said the Waldensians, "are the true disciples of Christ because we deny the **Donation of Constantine**" [see "**The Donation of Constantine**"], that is, the compromise of the Church with the world. In this they avoided two attitudes that would have been self-destructive: 1) a feeling that they were outside, or excluded from the Church, which would have led to a sectarian spirit—a closed-group mentality; and 2) a snobbish attitude of seeing themselves as the **only** true examples of faith, and therefore against the Church. They certainly did have a sense of being **the most faithful part** of the Church, but without a sense of sectarianism, or of separatism.

The Influence of Hus

This view of being a movement to return to the true apostolic example within the Church, without being separatistic, helps us see why, at the start of the 15th century, the Waldensians became followers of the renewal movement within Christian theology guided by the great Bohemian (Czech) preacher and theologian John Hus.

Hus was condemned and burned at the stake in 1415 for his teachings. He was a devoted Catholic, but taught that the Catholic Church's authority was secondary to the Bible's (not equal, as the Church taught), so even laypeople could judge the Church's actions by Scripture, and therefore the Bible should be translated for public use. He also taught that the real spiritual Church of Christ was not equivalent to the earthly Catholic Church; this implied that even the highest Church officials might not be part of the true spiritual seed of Christ.

Hus argued that the corrupt and extravagant lives of many Church leaders, as opposed to Christ's life of poverty, made this clear. Though Hus was martyred for his stand, his ideas later had a large influence on Luther and others, and pointed the way, along with the teachings of John Wycliffe, towards the Protestant Reformation. Hus's followers became known as the Bohemian Brethren. It is not hard to see how the ideas of the Waldensians lined up in many ways with the teachings of Hus, and why they became associated with the movement of the Bohemian Brethren.

The Age of the Barba

The 15th century represents a noteworthy moment in the vitality of the Waldensians. A particularly fascinating characteristic of this vitality was the **barba**. The term is significant in itself. In the Provençal dialect, in the Alpine area, this term meant "uncle," but, in its corresponding feminine form, it referred also to a leader who merited respect and obedience. The Waldensians used this term to refer to their pastors, perhaps in deliberate contrast to the Catholic practice of calling priests "father."

We do not have a lot of information about the barba, but what we have is sufficient to give us an idea. The young persons who decided to respond to this calling were aware of the risks. They prepared for their ministry in two ways. First, there was a fixed period of time in a "school." These were not only places of study and research, but places where one acquired a familiarity with Scripture, and culture in general. Above all they were places of training, retreats where one experienced life in community with others, young and old, to arrive at that spiritual and moral maturity that are essential in a life full of risk.

A barba received still deeper training, however, by accompanying an older barba in his missions of contact with the dispersed faithful. This on-the-job, practical work gave them the experience necessary to carry on the effort.

The activity of the barba was evidently, in the light of the little we know, prodigious—they accomplished a great deal. They traveled from Northern Italy to Provence, from Bohemia to the Alps, preaching, instructing, receiving the confessions of the faithful, following precise itineraries. They were almost always disguised, for example as religious pilgrims, or travelling merchants, in order to avoid being identified by the Inquisition [*the Catholic Church's organization for exposing heretics*]. They have often been presented as simple folk, with a great experience of faith and life, but of little learning.

The truth is quite different. We know this from numerous manuscripts in their Provençal tongue that have been found. These writings were obviously used by the barba. The minute, pocket-sized volumes containing sermons, tracts, poems, and grammar lessons are only the tip of an iceberg, revealing to us the vast cultural world of the Waldensians. Many of them are theological works coming from Hussite sources, which were not only translated, but adapted and elaborated. These accomplishments required sensibility and competence beyond that of the simple and uneducated.

Around the barba there was a well-organized clandestine world [*see The Pearl*]. In twos (according to the biblical model) they visited the faithful on well-defined itineraries, held assemblies to discuss their problems, and gathered and administered donations. The fact that in the course of the century very few barba were arrested, among the many that were active, is testimony to the perfection of their system.

Waldensian Theology

The Waldensians, probably in part due to the Hussite influence, experienced a growing consciousness of themselves and a new sensibility, which renewed their traditional spirituality. Their consciousness grew of being the "true church," the authentic community of Christ, in contrast to the Church of Rome, which always seemed to them to take on the form of Antichrist, not only in its compromise with worldly powers, but also in the violence with which it crushed the spiritual renovation in Bohemia.

A second characteristic is related to their concern for individual salvation. From this, the Waldensians showed a particular interest in penance, the Sacraments, and Christian virtue. The barba had the power to hear confessions. They were believed to be the only persons capable of doing so because, in contrast to other corrupt and immoral clerics, they were authentic ministers of Christ. (Waldensians believed, it should be mentioned, that as it says in one of their early poems, "It is God alone who pardons, and no other.")

Also, for these generations of Waldensians, salvation was clearly and certainly the work of Christ. It was the fruit of his sacrifice, but also the finality of a pure and consistent Christian life; a life of faith could not be separated from a life of obedience. Therefore, we can understand why in the 16th century a central point of debate among barba and the reformers was justification by faith, and how faith related to works.

The Waldensian position was looked upon from a Lutheran perspective as being too influenced by Catholic tradition. In reality, however, barba doctrine was plainly in contrast with the Catholic theology of

that century, for it dismissed the major Catholic teaching on purgatory. The Waldensian rejection of purgatory was radical.

One of the most well-known and significant poems of the barba, *La Nobla Leiczon* (a possible translation is "The Teaching of Profound Things" [*included in our From the Archives section*]), is constructed entirely on the comparison between the two ways, that of salvation and that of damnation. It formulates a radical criticism of those Christians who expect to resolve their problem of salvation with purgatory and its corollary of mass, indulgences, and good works (teachings that Martin Luther would later challenge in Wittenberg).

These things represented for the Waldensians a negation of the Christian faith, and the triumph of the Constantine Church, that is, of a church which utilizes power and riches to govern the world. What more radical comparison can one imagine than that between the pilgrim barba, messenger of forgiveness to his clandestine communities, and the popes of the Renaissance with their sales of indulgences, claiming their "power of the keys," the power to forgive sins and grant entrance to heaven? It is clear that these are two very different approaches.

The Great Reformation

To the scattered Waldensians concentrated mainly in the Alps in Provence and in Calabria, and greatly reduced through persecution, but having a solid theology and organization, news of the work of Martin Luther arrived in the period between 1518 and 1520.

What was to be done? Certainly the believers around Luther expressed themselves similarly to the Waldensians, but were the motivations the same? Could the Waldensians safely associate with the new communities coming together as a result of the reform movement, or would it be more prudent to keep a distance and maintain autonomy? It was not the first time that the problem arose for The Poor of collaborating with groups judged heretical by the official church. It had happened before with the Hussites and with the Albigensians. [*The Albigensians were a radical group, which originated in southern Italy, and taught that all material things, including the human body, were evil. Among other things, the Albigensians rejected the Sacraments, Hell, the Resurrection, and marriage, and taught a life of extreme denial. They were a part of a much larger world-versus-spirit "dualist" movement in the Middle Ages called Catharism.*]

Beginning in 1526 the barba, at their annual reunions in Piedmont and Provence, examined the news which came from Germany with the result that a group was sent to evaluate the situation at first hand, and to question major representatives of the new theology. On the journey a meeting occurred with William Farel, the fiery Swiss reformer who would play an instrumental part in the Waldensians' future; contact was also made with Oecolampadius, the reformer in Basel, and Martin Bucer of Strasbourg.

From these contacts it was clear that a fundamental unity of purpose did exist, especially in reference to a belief in Scripture as the only rule for faith. However, at the same time the approaches the two groups took to Scripture were different: the Waldensians, on the one hand, emphasized the moral demands made by the Bible, and its teaching on the climactic end of history—its *apocalyptic* message; the reformed group, on the other hand, emphasized the importance of deep, academic study of the Bible, and the system of theology founded upon such study—"dogmatics."

The consequences of these emphases on the different groups were shown in the way they applied their faith to their lives in society. The fact that those promoting the Reformation in the cities of the Rhine were the city councils, and in Germany it was the princes, profoundly baffled the Waldensians. Could the men of the world, whose daily lives were given over to the use of riches and power, now be the defenders of the apostolic faith?

This was hard to comprehend. Was this not the process of Constantine renewed—a new mixing of the spiritual with the worldly? Was it possible to transform a local *parish* (a church district set often by geographical boundaries and determined by men), the typical form of “imperial” Christianity, into a *community* based on the Gospel?

The Synod of Chanforan

The solution to these questions arrived in 1532 during an assembly held at Chanforan in the Angrogna Valley in the Piedmont Alps. 140 barba participated along with leaders of the Reformation in Switzerland, including William Farel. After days of debate the assembly decided to accept substantially the principles of the new reformation, and to apply them internally to the Waldensian movement itself.

The Waldensians in this way were as integrated into the world of the Reformation. It is necessary, however, to be precise. It must be remembered that in 1532 Protestantism did not yet exist as a confessional and cultural phenomenon. The Reformation at that moment was a movement of opinion, it was not a church.

By declaring themselves in line with the reformers, the Waldensians simply acknowledged their unity with the reformers’ protests for a faith based on the Gospel, for a return to the origins of the Church, and for an abandonment of the compromises with the world. The reformers were rejected by the official church for these beliefs even as the Waldensians had been for generations.

It is also significant that the decisions agreed upon at Chanforan by the barba and the reformers were not limited to the religious dimension, but had social and political importance also. The return to the Gospel meant not only a rediscovery of the purity of the faith, but also a liberation from the burden of economic slavery, of ecclesiastical taxation, and of the dependence which the Medieval Church had placed on the shoulders of the Christian populace.

By adhering to the Reformation the Waldensians expressed in new form the spirit of independence and autonomy which in the Middle Ages had characterized the Alpine peoples in the face of central powers. It was a realization of their sense of independence.

Furthermore, the meeting at Chanforan was but the beginning on a long journey that would lead the Waldensians to eventual organization as Protestant churches. In the face of a Roman Catholicism that assumed the characteristics of unbending worldly control, and that readily used the Inquisition and political power to repress whatever it declared heresy, the Waldensian communities developed increasingly along reformed lines according to the ideas coming from Calvin’s Geneva.

A New Church and the First War of Religion

This difficult search for a specific Waldensian identity culminated around 1555 (twenty years after Chanforan) in the decision to build facilities for preaching and the administration of the sacraments. For years services in the local dialect had been conducted in the open air or in private homes, with the singing of hymns and the celebration of the Lord’s Supper. However, the absence of buildings for these services underlined both the temporary, provisional nature of the situation, and the continuing hope for an agreement with the Church of Rome.

Once these hopes vanished it was necessary to recognize the existence of two churches, even from the point of view of architecture: two churches, two bell towers, two services, two theologies, two ecclesiastical organizations, two forms of piety, and two cultures.

In the middle of the 16th century these two identities (the Reformation and the Catholic, or Counter-Reformation) began a conflict that would last 150 years, and have in the area of the Alps where the

Waldensians lived, a particularly violent character.

The first battle took place in 1560. The Duke of Savoy, who had recently regained possession of his region, forced the Roman Catholic religion on all his subjects. He based this on the principle established a few years previously at the Diet of Augsburg and accepted by all the rulers of Europe, according to which the religion of the prince must be that of his subjects.

While all the followers of the Reformation in the plains and cities moved to Protestant areas, particularly to Geneva, the Waldensians in the Alpine Valleys stayed put and rejected the imposition of Catholicism. They continued to profess their reformed faith—even against the edict of their ruler. As a consequence the Duke intervened militarily to restore order. This action spurred a response of armed rebellion. Under this severe trial, the Waldensians, who had always opposed violence, had reached the point where they decided they must defend themselves, and fight for their faith.

This was the ***first war of religion in Europe***, and also ***the first case in which subjects of a ruler rebelled to defend their religious freedom***. The conflict lasted several weeks and concluded incredibly with the victory of the Waldensian farmers, who benefitted from a series of complex strategical, political, and geographical elements.

The Duke, taking an historic position unique in Europe at this time, conceded to his Waldensian subjects the right to profess their religion within a specified territory, with the number of worship centers and ministers defined by law.

These remarkable events were enough to assure the Waldensians' survival. But in subsequent decades the battle would continue, and proceed with tragedies, varying successes, and great risks.

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The Donation of Constantine

The *Donation of Constantine* was a document of great importance in the Middle Ages. It was used by the Church to support its claim of supreme rule over even earthly powers. It supposedly was given by the Emperor Constantine to Pope Sylvester I in the 4th century, when Constantine relocated his capital in Constantinople, granting the pope (therefore the Roman Church) dominion over all Italy, as well as over Jerusalem, Constantinople, and Alexandria. It also claimed that Constantine had bestowed upon the papacy supreme control over all clergy, and, more significantly, a great deal of political power (though Sylvester had, apparently, humbly refused to accept from Constantine the Imperial Crown!).

For centuries the Donation was accepted by all, giving the popes great political clout. However, in the 15th century it was proven by Nicholas of Cusa, a German cardinal and scholar, to be a forgery.

Apparently it had been forged during the Frankish Empire in the 8th or 9th century. In that period the papacy was in a constant struggle for control with the powerful Carolingian rulers (such as the Holy Roman Emperor Charlemagne). The Church at Rome, seeing its power threatened, devised the idea, and produced the document that came to be known as The Donation.

The Waldensians (unaware that the document was a forgery) considered Sylvester's supposed acceptance of worldly political power as a denial of the humility and poverty fundamental to obedient followers of Christ and the Apostles. They believed that from the 4th century on, the Church had compromised with the world, and therefore had denied Christ. And the power and luxury they saw in the Church seemed to support their claim.

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The Pearl of Great Price

An inquisitor of the 14th century has left us a lively account of a Waldensian preacher who went about in the guise of an itinerant salesman. It seems that upon his arrival at the local manor all the townspeople, including masters and servants, would gather around while he showed his various wares—fabrics, jewelry, and artifacts

But even as he sold he would make allusion to more precious goods in his possession, to jewels of inestimable value he was in a position to offer. The curiosity of his audience kindled, the Waldensian would then speak of The Pearl of Great Price, the Gospel of Jesus, and gradually proceed to contrast the official Church, in its love of power, riches, and luxury with the purity of the Gospel.

Ties always existed between the Waldensians and merchants, following the example of their merchant founder, Waldo. It is interesting to note, also, that when some of the Waldensians were being tried in court they referred to the Master, who had given them their wares.

Waldensians of the time evidently considered this kind of activity as a useful shield, which permitted them to travel without creating suspicion. In order to escape the Inquisition, the itinerant ministers had to be ready to move around constantly and in great secrecy. Unknown by name, they arrived in a locality, stayed a few days, then disappeared at night.

In Germany they were called "apostles." A Polish saying tells us they were "men who tell the truth."

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The Renaissance of the Gospel

A Brief Sketch of the Italian Reformation

Emidio Campi is a Waldensian pastor in Zurich, Switzerland. He also teaches church history in the University of Zurich, and was formerly general secretary of the World Student Christian Federation.

A famous seventeenth-century Dutch engraving, known as *The Candlestick*, pictures the Reformers of the sixteenth century, and certain others, gathered around a table on which shines a candle. Among the divines represented is the German Martin Luther, the French John Calvin, the Swiss Ulrich Zwingli, the Czech John Hus, the Scotsman John Knox, the Slav Matthias Flaius Illyricus, and the Englishman William Perkins. Because these various leaders often represented conflicting theological viewpoints, it takes some imagination to envision them meeting together so peacefully.

However, though the picture is incomplete, it does furnish a fair graphic representation of the character of the European Protestant Reformation. Born in Germany, it was not confined to the world of the small German states. Already in the 1530s Lutheranism penetrated and sank roots in the Scandinavian countries.

In the Swiss cantons of Zurich, Bern, and Basel of the Helvetic Confederation, and in the free republic of Geneva, a vigorous reform of the Church took place. This movement, which was parallel to, but not identical with Lutheranism, we call *reformed Protestantism*. From this base reform spread out all over Europe—from France to the Netherlands, to East Central Europe—and later to the New World.

The Reformation in England was certainly more than an act of Parliament. To the building up of the Anglican Church (*ecclesia anglicana*) contributed numerous and able theologians, such as Thomas Cranmer and Hugh Latimer. In Scotland, between 1557 and 1560, the preaching of John Knox had great and decisive influence upon the small landed aristocracy (the *Lairds*), who, against the will of the staunchly Catholic Queen Mary (“Bloody Mary”), imposed Calvinism as the state religion of Scotland.

Snuffing the Candle in Italy

Also in the engraving are two Italian theologians: the Florentine *Peter Martyr Vermigli* and the Bergamo-born *Jerome Zanchi*. Their presence demonstrates that Italy was not cut off from the circulation of ideas and proposals of Church renewal in the first half of the sixteenth century in Europe. Indeed, numerous recent studies have shown convincingly that the Protestant Reformation, in all its forms (from Lutheranism to Calvinism to Anabaptism), penetrated and sank roots in Italy. It made converts at every level of society and witnessed the formation of underground circles, not only in the most northerly regions adjacent to Protestant countries, but also in the remote southern areas of Calabria and Sicily.

The conditions for free and open debate did not exist, however, in the Italian Christianity of the sixteenth century. The political powers would not allow it, for they used religious uniformity as a means of ensuring their control (a means of rule—*instrumentum regni*); nor could the Church of Rome tolerate disagreement without its authority being put radically in question.

A quarter of a century or so after the protest of Martin Luther—once it had become clear that it was impossible to stem the penetration of the new “protestant” faith—the Roman hierarchy moulded a plan to block the spread of the heresy and reconquer the lost ground. Rome reconstituted its establishment for rooting out and punishing heresy, the Inquisition (1542), and at the council of Trent (1545) fixed its doctrines in opposition to the Protestant theology, and promoted a number of reforms of religious life of

its own, which would not undermine its institutional power. This is usually known as the Catholic, or Counter-Reformation

The Waldensian Exception

As a result of the increasing efficiency of the Inquisition and the failure of any prince or republic to take up the cause of the Reformation against Rome (Italy as a whole had come under the control of Catholic Spain, the epitome of intolerance), Protestantism in Italy was gradually extinguished by 1600. There was however a single exception: The Waldensians.

In the valleys of Piedmont, located west of the city of Turin near the French border, Waldensian peasants and mountaineers, who in 1532 had joined the Calvinist faith, fought an amazing guerrilla war for their freedom. They stood off the troops of their lord, the Duke of Savoy, and obtained toleration for their faith within the narrow confines of their valleys. The agreement of Cavour (June 1561) recognized, **for the first time in the Reformation era**, the right of a religious minority to practice publicly a faith that differed from that of the ruler and the majority of the population. (The established practice in Europe was that subjects of a prince were obligated to accept his faith.) The same toleration, however, did not favor the Waldensian communities of Calabria in southern Italy; they were ruthlessly persecuted and eliminated in 1561.

Although Protestantism was finally suppressed in Italy (with the Waldensian exception), the Italian Reformation was saved from becoming a fossil of history by the intellectual activity of certain Italian exiles who found refuge in other Protestant countries. Some of them made enduring contributions to European theology and culture. Indeed, since 1542, a recurring phenomenon in Italian history is the emigration—flight—of intellectuals who have refused to bend to violence.

Italian Reformers

The most outstanding Italian theologians who fled the country soon after the reconstitution of the Roman Inquisition were Peter Martyr Vermigli, formerly a prior of the Augustinian order, and Bernardino Ochino, a highly sought after preacher in Italy. During the brief reign of Edward VI in England, Vermigli was given the Regius professorship of theology at Oxford University, and Ochino received a benefice in London. Together they participated in the revision of the Book of Common Prayer and in the formulation of the Forty-two articles of religion promoted by the great Anglican reformer Thomas Cranmer. Compelled to flee England at the accession of Mary Tudor, Vermigli ended his career serving with great distinction as professor of Scripture at Zurich. Ochino lived out his time in exile in Moravia.

Another influential Italian reformer was Peter Paul Vergerio. The atmosphere of self-examination and self-criticism that spread throughout the European Christian world reached this once-powerful papal advisor and bishop of Capodistria. Converted to the Protestant faith, he took refuge in the Valtellina, a mountainous area extending north-east from Milan, which was, in his day, under the control of Zurich. He later became a theological adviser to Duke Christoph of Wurttemberg. Concern for the communication of the Gospel was a hallmark of this reformer, who published an astonishing number of tracts, prayers, and liturgies—some of them of classic beauty.

From Lucca—the city where Peter Martyr Vermigli had helped found the first Protestant academy of Italy—came Emanuel Tremelio and Jerome Zanchi, two distinguished biblical scholars who taught at Heidelberg University in Germany.

Fleeing the Darkness

From the 1550s to the 1570s there was an exodus of about sixty leading Italian families, who controlled the Italian commerce in silk and velvet. By the first decades of the seventeenth century both the Church

in Geneva and its famous academy were largely dominated by the descendants of these families. One such person, John Diodati, represented the Genevan Church at the Synod of Dordt in Holland in 1618 (where the “Five Points” of Calvinism were drawn up). Diodati also prepared an elegant Italian translation of the Bible in 1607.

Another graduate from Geneva, the important theologian Francesco Turretini (1623–1687), was undoubtedly the most prominent Genevan theologian after Calvin. Turretin’s three-volume work on theology was used as the standard handbook of reformed theology in the major theological faculties of Europe and North America until the last century.

Hundreds of families, being pursued by the Inquisition for “heretical leanings,” abandoned Modena, Ferrara, Mantova, and Venice. Among them were humanist scholars, nobles, poets, and physicians.

From Naples, Galeazzo Caracciolo, Marquis of Vico and nephew of Pope Paul IV, fled to Geneva. He was instrumental in building up the Italian reformed Church. The account of Caracciolo’s dramatic life, written by Nicolo Balbani, an exile from Lucca who served as pastor of the Italian Church in Geneva, appeared in English translation under the extravagant title *News from Italy of a Second Moses*, and as *The Italian Convert*. Under this last title it was published in Boston in 1751, becoming the first book by an Italian to be printed in America.

On the other hand, hundreds of outstanding laypeople and clergy like the Florentine Antonio Bucioli, the first translator of the Bible into Italian, were tortured and died in the prisons of the Inquisition. They found out in a very real sense that Christian faith involves much more than ideas or religious practices, and that the sign of the Cross was more than a religious gimmick.

Another aspect of the Italian Reformation was the influence of the intellectual activity of certain radical religious Italian exiles who found refuge in Protestant Europe. The great Italian historian Delio Cantimori argued earlier in this century that these figures had a significant impact on European culture by introducing into the mainstream of the Reformation humanistic influences they derived from the Italian Renaissance. In this regard, we should mention the example of Lelio and Fausto Sozzini, who started *Socinianism*, a heretical movement that had its fullest flowering in the late sixteenth century in eastern Europe. (Socinianism is unitarian—it denies the Trinity.)

The Freedom of the Word

“The Word did it all ... I left it to the Word,” said Martin Luther in that startling—and unconvincing—statement, as if, as he later said, when the Reformation happened he was quietly drinking beer with his friends. (Indeed, the Reformation was slightly more than a storm in a beer mug!) It shook the world and overturned kingdoms; it was mingled with ugly elements of greed, power, and pride, with political and social matters. Still, perhaps the unshakable trust (*certitudo*) in the power of the Word of God is its indelible mark.

The assertion that the Word of God could not be bound by human fear, but must go daringly free was also shared by the Italian Reformers. And they were sensitively aware that the Reformation watchword “by Faith alone” (*Sola Fide*) was the end of legalism—of the lopsided over emphasis on reward and merit.

They also recovered the concept of the Church as primarily *people*—as the communion of the Saints, with the attending emphasis on Christian equality, and the priesthood of all believers. Yet, due to the peculiar, difficult situation in Italy, they had no opportunity for experimenting and discussing novel ideas in lecture rooms. They knew that for their ideas, they must be prepared to suffer and, if need be, to die.

Not for nothing, the author of the *Benefit of Jesus Christ*, a noble theological document of the Italian Reformation, spoke for most of the Protestants of his country when he stressed that

As Christ suffered all the persecutions and shames of the worlde for the glory of God, so ought we joyfully to sustayne the shames and persecutions that the false Christians do to all thos that will lyve godly in Christ.

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A Time for Mourning, A Time for War

From the Reformation to the Glorious Return

John Hobbins, a native of the United States, attended the Waldensian seminary in Rome, and serves as pastor of several Methodist-Waldensian Churches on the island of Sicily.

At the beginning of the 17th century, the Waldensians numbered twenty thousand. Under the firm leadership of a handful of pastors, and a more numerous group of schoolmasters, they kept one hand on the Bible and the other on the hoe, one eye on Geneva and the other on the New Jerusalem of the heavens above.

Tillers of the soil and keepers of flocks, the Waldensians dwelt exclusively in a remote corner of Italy. The Counter-Reformation of the Roman Catholic Church had forced them to shut themselves up in the mountains, amidst the Cottian Alps, between the towering peaks.

The region was divided between two sovereigns: the Delfinato, an area including the upper Dora and Chisone Valleys, belonged to the King of France; the Pellice and Germanasca Valleys belonged to the Duke of Savoy. The area's culture and language was (and is) the expression of a combination of two cultures: French and Italian.

Massacre and Mortal Struggle

The Waldensians prospered. They built churches and schools, and began to move out to the plains below. Everywhere they brought with them the Bible and the Psalms put to music by the French Calvinists—the Huguenots.

A reaction set in in the Piedmont. Injunctions and decrees, incursions and pillage of the countryside put the Waldensians to the test, but they did not give in. In the end, the authorities in Turin took drastic measures. In January 1655, a judge ordered the Waldensians to abandon all they possessed beyond the territorial limits established almost 100 years before by the treaty of Cavour (1561). The Marquis of Pianezza was stationed at Torre in the Pellice Valley, but his 700 soldiers were no match for the 2,000 Waldensians observing them from the safety of the surrounding hills.

Meanwhile, however, a great army of French soldiers was marching nearby in the Susa valley, on its way to attack the Spanish in Lombardy. Why not borrow a few regiments ... and finish off the Waldensians? And so it was decided in Turin.

In 1655, on Easter week, 5,000 first-class soldiers were thrown against the Waldensians. Given permission to pillage, the French were merciless: they killed, tortured, raped, and looted. Those who escaped death were put to flight, or were forced to surrender; 1,712 souls breathed their last. The infamous event is known in Waldensian history as the Piedmont Easter Massacre.

The Waldensians finally seemed broken forever.

Called to Arms

The French army finished their work and left immediately for the battlefields of Lombardy. The surviving

Waldensian population had escaped to the Chisone Valley in French territory, where a "sanctuary" of popular resistance was organized.

The men took up arms, crossed the river Chisone, and attacked the enemy from behind. Guerrilla war tactics were used. The most important leader in this war was Joshua Gianavello. From his headquarters in the Angrogna Valley he led a popular militia of at least 2,000 combatants, with Calvinistic rigor. Victory was won. At the same time, an "international brigade" of 500 volunteers, mostly Huguenots, was organized in French territory at Pinasca. Together with a division of calvary they came to the aid of the Waldensians.

The comeback of the Waldensians was spectacular. But it would have been unthinkable without the mobilization of Protestant Europe. Three days after the massacre inflicted by the French, the news traveled in the direction of Geneva. It soon arrived in Paris, Holland, Germany, and in England.

Pastor John Léger, a leader of the Waldensians during their ordeal, traveled about Europe testifying to his peoples' woes. The gazettes of Paris, London, and Amsterdam denounced the unjust massacre. The House of Savoy was put on the defensive, both on ideological and diplomatic fronts. Puritan England, and her Protestant "Lord Protector," Oliver Cromwell, were shocked by the event; Cromwell soon sealed a pact with France for a solution to "the Waldensian problem" [*see the article on Cromwell, "A Friend in the Lord Protector"*].

In the midst of the struggle, the Waldensians wrote a Confession of Faith, a defense of their right to freedom of conscience. To this day Waldensian pastors subscribe to this Confession before their ordination.

The Right of Freedom and Freedom Lost

The war was over. A compromise was negotiated at Pinerolo. The French ambassador and the Swiss cantons acted as mediators. The so-called *Patent of Grace* gave the Waldensians back practically all their rights. The agreement was reached the 18th of August, before the English and Dutch ambassadors were able to throw the weight of the Protestant republics into the balance and exact an agreement more in accord with the moral and military victory of the Waldensians and their allies.

The Waldensians, however, had seen death face to face. They preferred a low-profile settlement, one that did not needlessly humiliate the House of Savoy.

The compromise, however, satisfied no one. Weighed down after having conceded so much, the Duke of Savoy went back on his promise not to rebuild the Fort of Torre Pellice; instead he reinforced the garrisons. He sentenced Giovanni Léger to death five times, but in his absence. Léger had departed for Holland, where in 1669 he wrote his monumental history of the Waldensians. He prepared the way for the "Dutch Connection" which would prove decisive at the moment of the "Glorious Return."

Under constant pressure, the Waldensians, a patient but ever-ready people, responded with guerrilla war tactics as before. Once again, Gianavello led the way. Accused of serious crimes and summoned to Turin, he refused to appear in court and in 1658 was given the death penalty.

Forty-two other Waldensian leaders were declared outlaws and were not to set foot in the Piedmont. They were considered banished and thereafter known as "bandits."

In 1663, full-scale war broke out. Gianavello established headquarters at Villar Pellice, and fortified the upper Pellice and Angrogna Valleys. He then went on the offensive and sacked Luserna, the hated feudal capital, and struck Cavour and Bagnolo. A counterattack upon the Waldensians in Angrogna by four thousand Piedmont soldiers was a clamorous failure.

The Duke was now ready to concede everything, but on one condition: The “bandits” would remain outlaws and had to leave the area and never return. Gianavello went into exile for the rest of his life. Agreement was reached, but the cost was high. The Waldensians had lost a part of their freedom.

A Catholic Empire

By now, the international situation was profoundly altered. In France, Louis XIV had risen to the throne. Louis (known as the **Sun King** because of his life of great splendor) put together a formidable army and competed with Holland for the control of commerce, and with England for control of the seas. Spain was in decline; France was the new Catholic empire.

As far as the French Calvinists were concerned, Louis XIV did not intend to allow them any room at all. In the end, he denied them even the right to exist. The so-called Revocation of the Edict of Nantes* [* **The Edict of Nantes** (1598) had granted French Protestants freedom to practice their religion within certain limits.] (October 18, 1685) spelled ruin for the Waldensians as well as for the Huguenots.

With a stroke of the pen, the flourishing Waldensian communities of the Chisone and upper Susa Valleys were blotted out. 3,000 left for Germany with their pastors; another 8,000 swore submission.

The situation in French territory was disastrous for the Waldensians for another reason. The French Calvinists did not submit to the dictates of their sovereign. Hundreds of thousands preferred exile to forced conversion, and left for Holland, Germany, Switzerland, and North America. Many Huguenots of the Alpine region sought to stay as close as possible to French territory, and found refuge in the Waldensian valleys of the Piedmont.

However the Paris government did not lose time in taking note of the formation of a sanctuary of resistance along its borders. Pressure was put on the government of Savoy to resolve the situation.

A Subordinate State

Vittorio Amedeus II, full of ambition and fear, had just risen to the throne in Turin. He quickly agreed to forbid the Waldensians to take in French refugees or lend any aid whatsoever to their brethren in France.

The edict was too bland to satisfy Louis XIV, but sufficient to alarm the Waldensians. The pastors anxiously searched the Scriptures. The people began to arm themselves, store away provisions, and withdraw their families to the mountains. They did not, however, take into account the decisive fact that war and exile had reduced them to half their original number. Worse still, they now had to face both France and the Piedmont at the same time. France, moreover, had grown strong, and was awakening fear in all of Europe.

The pastors knew this fact very well. They had studied abroad. They had seen the rest of Europe, and were aware of the power represented by the French throne. They admonished their people to stay calm and to hold still.

Not all the pastors were content to hold still, however. Henry Arnaud, the young and energetic pastor of Pinasca, wanted to act. A rash young man, he had studied in Basel, Geneva, and most notably, Holland. The progressive Dutch he had come into contact with were of French imperialism, contrary as it was to their theology and commerce. Arnaud was tired of it as well. In Pinasca he faced the dragoons of the King of France—so-called “missionaries of the Holy Faith.” It seemed to him that so much arrogance could not endure forever, disrespectful as it was of the rights and autonomy of others. Arnaud did not share the cautious optimism of the other pastors. According to him, it was time to prepare for battle. It was time to take the risk.

A Closing Trap

The situation worsened in the Piedmont. The commotion among the Waldensians forced the Duke's hand. First he sent a battalion to man the fort in Torre Pellice. Then, on January 31, 1686, he issued an edict similar to the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes.

- The Waldensian churches were to be burned to the ground.
- Protestant assembly of any kind was strictly forbidden.
- All children were to be baptized and educated in the Roman Catholic faith (many Waldensian children would be kidnapped for this purpose).
- Pastors and schoolmasters had 15 days to choose between exile or conversion to Catholicism.
- The Huguenots who had found refuge in the valleys had to leave immediately.

Very few Waldensians betrayed their faith, though conversion was recompensed in hard cash. On the contrary, the valleys were fortified, as in the days of Gianavello. In every village, a group of volunteers was formed. In all they numbered 2,500—not many at all against the 9,000 soldiers that France and the Piedmont were mustering against them.

A sort of armed truce lasted but a month. The Duke then forbade the sale of arms and provisions to the Waldensians. The Waldensians disregarded the Duke's orders, and on the 6th of March they re-established their public worship, marriage, and baptism.

The trap was closing. Ambassadors were sent by Berne and Zurich. They understood that now the Waldensians' only hope was exile. Yet they were unable to convince the Waldensians. The number of those in favor of continued armed resistance was growing.

In the meantime, Catinat, the supreme commander of the French army in the Piedmont, made it known to the Duke that if he did not take the necessary measures, the French would be happy to take the matter into their own hands. In any case, the Duke had decided to act. His edict of April 9th enjoined the Waldensians to put down their arms within eight days and go into exile between April 21st and 23rd. If able, they were free to sell their land and possessions to the highest bidder.

The Trap Shuts

Who would pay a fair price for houses and land that had to be sold within eight days? Without money, and without land, the Waldensians would find themselves without honor as well, because they would be forced to admit to treason, though they had never committed it. Reduced to a band of poor wretches, without a future, they would barely make it to the Swiss border. Was it not better to risk one's own skin: to obey God rather than men?

So said Henry Arnaud, just returned from Holland. On April 18th he made a stirring appeal before an assembly at Roccapiatta. Those in favor of armed resistance were now the majority. The truce expired April 20th; the Waldensians prepared for battle.

The Waldensians had never been so close to annihilation. The enemy blockaded all the passes in the Alps, and two soldiers were mustered for every three Waldensians, old women and children included.

Many Waldensians surrendered before the French and Piedmontese armies. Others were brutally massacred. The women were raped.

When the Duke retired to Turin on June 8th, the war seemed decided. 2,000 Waldensians had been killed. Another 2,000 had "accepted" the Catholic theology of the Council of Trent—and the government payment. 8,000 had been imprisoned; more than half of them would die of starvation or sickness within six months.

Two Hundred Desperadoes

Up in the mountains, two or three hundred men continued to hold out. As the "victorious" regiments departed and thousands of peasants from the Piedmont arrived to claim the valleys as their own, the Waldensian desperadoes organized, stole animals and forage, and killed spies and traitors.

The Catholic authorities were impotent against the activities of these rebels in their mountain refuge. Negotiations were opened with the "Invincibles." They responded, "We have not been defeated by anyone. Our right of passage through the land of Savoy must be recognized. Our families must be released immediately, and all the Waldensians freed from prison thereafter, and given the means to reach Geneva." The negotiations were tense, but in the end the rebels' conditions were accepted.

The Duke kept his word, but in the worst way imaginable. On 3 January 1687 he issued an edict which forced a brutal choice upon the prisoners. Either they had to depart immediately, in the middle of winter, and risk death in the mountains, or convert to Roman Catholicism, be given a new home in the Vercelli region of the Piedmont, and risk malaria in the rice fields. Once again, the Waldensians were divided in two parts. About 1,100 chose the rice fields. Around 2,800 preferred the long winter march. Days on end they made their way through the snow; many died in blizzards; many of their children were kidnapped along the way. 2,490 eventually reached Geneva.

A Sky the Color of Orange

Something new was fermenting in Europe. The Emperor of Austria had had enough of the arrogance of the King of France. Together with the Lutheran nobility of Germany, with Sweden and Spain, he formed the League of Augsburg in 1686 in order to put a stop to the French colossus. War would follow, from 1688 to 1697.

William III of Orange ruled in Holland. A strong defender of Dutch freedom and Calvinist democracy against Louis XIV, he was prepared to fight it out with the "Beast of Versailles" to the bloody end. [*Versailles was Louis' highly elegant palace.*] Even the Waldensians had a place in his plan of action. In October 1688, he gave an audience to Henry Arnaud, advised him to keep calm, but promised him arms and diplomatic protection. At the right moment, the Waldensians would be able to return to their valleys, and open a new military front against the King of France.

William III went on the win England back to the Protestant camp. Louis XIV declared war on Holland, but the Dutch resisted. The Austrian empire, Spain, the German nobility, Holland, and England conducted a veritable world war against France. It would last nearly 10 years (from 1688–1697), and leave the land soaked in blood.

The Fulfillment of Prophecy

The Waldensians were reduced to 3,400. But they considered themselves a "little nation." They longed to return to the heritage of their fathers, sacred, like the vineyard of Naboth mentioned in I Kings 21. In 1687 and in 1688, they tried to return, but without success.

The Waldensians reorganized in Switzerland. Their vision of history was fueled by the language and method of Biblical apocalyptic, the ancient, fantastic visions of the people of God.

As the events began to unfold in 1686, the Huguenot Peter Jurieu interpreted prophecy from his vantage point in Dutch exile. The Two Witnesses of Revelation 11 were the Reformed Church of France and the Waldensian Church, both exalted to martyrdom by the "Beast which rises from the Abyss" (Rev. 11:7)—the King of France. The three and a half days (11:11) correspond to three and a half years, to expire in 1688. For the Beast it will be the beginning of the end, whereas God will breathe new life into the Two Witnesses, and the whole world will see it (Rev. 1:13).

Indeed, the situation changed in 1688. The world was in ferment. War was breaking out. Thanks to the aid of William of Orange, the Waldensians acquired shining new muskets. No longer would they have to face a modern army with obsolete arms. Joshua Gianavello rewrote his *Manual for Guerrilla Warfare* for the third time, this time in French, for the Huguenots who had joined the cause. He explained how to cross the mountains and valleys of Savoy, and how to take hostages.

Once in the beloved valleys, they had to be ready for a long war. Guerrilla warfare tactics would be essential. Their refuge of last resort would be Basiglia, high in the valley of Massello. The Bible was to be their constant guide and daily companion. Their organization was to be democratic; the little army was to elect its own officers on a periodic basis. The pastors were to care for the souls of the soldiers, prevent pillage and massacres, and strengthen their sense of "union, which has always been at the heart of our way of life."

What followed in 1689 (300 years ago), referred to as the "Glorious Return," is one of the most important events in Waldensian history. With a faith and courageousness as great as the tenacity they had shown in their long struggle to survive, the Waldensians would return to reclaim their beloved homeland, never to be driven away again.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 22: Waldensians: Medieval "Evangelicals"

1989 - The 300th Anniversary of the Glorious Return

Giorgio Tourn is a Waldensian pastor in Torre Pellice in the Waldensian Valleys. He is the chairman of the Society for Waldensian Church History, and has written several books. This article is excerpted and adapted from his book *You Are My Witnesses*.

On the night of 17 August 1689, 900 men ferried across the Lake of Geneva to the village of Yvoire. From there they proceeded by forced marches, climbing hills and scaling mountains, across the 130 miles which separated them from the Waldensian Valleys.

Preceded and followed by hostages taken in the villages along the way so as to avert any resistance, the commando column moved forward relentlessly, the exhausted and wounded left lying in the road. The surprise and the daring itinerary made it possible to avoid an encounter with Savoy troops, their only clash with French soldiers being at Salberstrand in the Susa valley on the night of the 23rd.

In spite of heavy losses the Waldensians were victorious. Seeing this "foreign legion" descending upon them, the Catholic people in the valleys abandoned their homes and took flight toward the plains to the east. The Germanasca Valley was freed without a struggle.

At Prali it was necessary to regroup and count losses. Casualties to this point numbered 30%, including those killed in action, wounded left along the road, scouts captured by the enemy, and some French who deserted. Henry Arnaud then seized the occasion of the liberation of the former Waldensian Church from its Catholic "idols" to preach a sermon on a text from Psalm 129, in which he sought to interpret for his companions the significance of the venture they were engaged in. This Protestant rampart to which they had come thus far, he said, had to be fully reconquered in order that Gospel preaching might once more be present in Catholic Piedmont. Theirs was not a march of nostalgia, but a combat by soldiers doing the will of the Lord. As one soldier recorded in his diary:

It is not possible to recount all that we suffered in the mountains, but our zeal was rekindled by the thought of returning to our homeland, there to reestablish the reign of Jesus Christ while we destroyed the idols of the anti-Christ.

This same determination was reaffirmed high in the Alps, during the course of an assembly when a pact of union was signed [see "***The Covenant of Sibaud***"]. It was appropriately called a "covenant," an expression borrowed from the Puritans that well reflects the temper of the times.

Here was a Protestant mini-army, carrying out its mission in the great anti-French battle. But it was an army of Waldensians, nourished by that community conscience which had been created by centuries of intensive struggle and debate. Outwardly, the soldiers could be identified by the little orange ribbons on their caps or jackets, the emblem of the House of Orange, leader of the anti-French coalition.

The exchange of vows between officers and men in this little army, however, was far from routine, expressing that solidarity which characterized Waldensian spirituality. It was not by chance that of two written texts that were the guiding lights of the undertaking, one was the Bible and the other a book of instructions on guerrilla warfare by one of their most daring and successful fighters from the 1655 resistance, Josue Janavel.

This little popular militia thus hurled a considerable challenge to their opponent, Catinat, and his army:

a military challenge, because it represented the danger of an insurrection; but above all an ideological challenge, because this non-professional guerrilla army was not fighting merely for conquest, but to make a reality of its ideals.

"Liquidate the Waldensians immediately!" was the response of Catinat. Things did not turn out as he had ordered, however, and by winter the guerrilla force was well established in Piedmont. It became necessary to leave the Waldensian bands in their strongholds—on the crags overlooking the village of Balziglia.

The Longest Day

Months of cold, solitude and guerrilla raids took their toll; the Huguenot commander himself abandoned the undertaking. There were only 300 Waldensians who remained and even they were deprived of means of escape. At this point Henry Arnaud assumed the leadership. He had already played a decisive role in organizing the expedition, but now he became both the religious and military leader of the little Waldensian band, even as Josue Janavel had been in 1655.

In a sense, these men symbolized the two aspects in the Waldensian communities of the 17th century: Janavel, a peasant farmer rooted in the soil, Arnaud, the sophisticated intellectual.

Henry Arnaud was a wholly remarkable figure. Not without pride and frequently authoritarian, he nonetheless accomplished his task, organizing his 300 men and maintaining contact with the Protestant League.

If this little band of desperates, now buried under the snow, suffering from hunger and anxiety, were not turned into a band of plunderers, but grew in sense of vocation as a true Reformed community, it was due entirely to him and to the pounding rhythm of his preaching, where there was no thought of uncertainty of their cause and no surrender. Everything was focused on the battle in the coming Shrine.

The fateful day arrived on May 2nd. 4,000 French dragoons under the command of the Marquis de Feuquiere were lined up along the valley in full battle array. On the craggy heights above were 300 men, in rags, manning their trenches. In the pre-dawn silence the Waldensians held their last worship. The hymn heard down in the valley had nothing churchy about it; it was the 68th Psalm sung to a martial beat:

***Let God arise, let His enemies be scattered:
Let them also that hate Him flee before Him.
As smoke is driven away, so drive them away:
As wax melteth before the fire,
so let the wicked perish.***

The first assault of the French took place in a blinding snow storm among the trees of an overhanging slope. After a day of fierce hand-to-hand fighting it was repulsed. Once again the marquis attacked, this time after having commanded the peasants to roll his cannons up the steep inclines so that his artillery could get at the Waldensian defenses. After this pounding the trenches had to be abandoned, and the last Waldensian survivors gathered on a buttress awaiting their death. Then the totally unexpected happened.

During the night, while they were tending their bivouac fires, a deep fog descended on the whole area, allowing the Waldensians to escape. In this the Waldensians saw God's hand. Confident of his victory, de Feuquiere had already dispatched word to Paris announcing the capture of the "barbeti." Instead, the survivors were now on farther mountains, out of reach.

Still another event—equally unforeseen, but of far greater significance—was taking place at almost the same time. The unpredictable Vittorio Amedeus II a few days later broke his alliance with France and joined forces with England and Austria.

The Waldensians were saved! An order went out to free the last prisoners and pastors in Piedmont. Refugees returned home from Germany and Switzerland. Around the surviving nucleus of the 300 soldiers the community could begin rebuilding. It had been decimated and exhausted, but, amazingly, it was saved.

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The Covenant of Sibaud 1689

God by his grace, having brought us happily back to the heritages of our fathers, to reestablish there the pure service of our holy religion—in continuance and for the accomplishment of the great enterprise which this great God of armies hath hitherto carried on in our favor—

We, pastors, captains, and other officers, swear and promise before the living God, and on the life of our souls, to keep union and order among ourselves; and not to separate and disunite ourselves from one another, whilst God shall preserve us in life, if we should be reduced even to three or four in number ...

And we, soldiers, promise and swear this day before God to be obedient to the orders of our officers, and to continue faithful to them, even to the last drop of our blood ...

And in order that union, which is the soul of all our affairs, may remain always unbroken among us, the officers swear fidelity to the soldiers, and the soldiers to the officers;

All together promising to our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ to rescue, as far as it is possible to us, the dispersed remnant of our brethren from the yoke which oppresses them, that along with them we may establish and maintain in these valleys the kingdom of the gospel, even unto death.

In witness whereof, we swear to observe this present engagement so long as we shall live.

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A Friend in the Lord Protector

Oliver Cromwell and the Effort to Save the Waldensians

Oliver Cromwell became the ruler of England—the Lord Protector—in 1653, after the English Civil Wars. In 1655, when news came to England of the massacre of Waldensians by French troops, Cromwell, and all England, were gripped with horror and indignation at the reports of the brutal treatment of "those of like precious faith." Accounts of the kidnapping, rape, and gruesome torture of women and children especially fueled the English fury.

The Puritan pulpits of England rang out with fiery sermons condemning the acts. Across England many church interiors were painted red as a constant reminder to the public of the suffering of their brothers and sisters in the Alps.

For months Cromwell was preoccupied with the plight of the Waldensians. He sponsored a public collection of money for relief for the survivors, and even donated £2,000 of his own. As much as half a million pounds was raised as a result of the campaign. He oversaw the details of the relief program, to ensure that the money reached those in most need.

He also sent letters to various European rulers (composed by his famous secretary, John Milton), calling for their help, even implying military intervention. Finally, after close negotiations between Cromwell and Catholic France, the French pressured the Duke into stopping his cruel campaign.

The following are two of Cromwell's letters, and a poem by Milton.

Letter to the Duke of Savoy (1655)* [This is a translation of the original, which was composed in Latin by John Milton. From William S. Gilly's, Narrative of an excursion to the mountains of Piedmont, London, 1827.*]**

Most serene Prince,

We are informed by letters received from several places in the vicinity of your dominions, that the subjects of your royal highness, professing the reformed religion, have been commanded by an edict, published by your authority, to quit their habitations and lands, within three days after the promulgation of the said edict, under pain of death, and the confiscation of their property, unless they shall enter into an engagement to abjure their own, and to embrace the Roman Catholic faith, before the end of twenty days. We have learnt also, that regardless of their humble petitions to your highness, praying that you would be pleased to revoke the said edict and to grant the same privileges, which were anciently conceded by your serene ancestors, your army fell upon them, cruelly slaughtered great numbers, imprisoned others, and drove the rest to fly for refuge to desolate places, and to mountains covered with snow, where hundreds of families are reduced to such extremity, that, it is to be feared, they will all shortly perish with cold and hunger. Upon receiving intelligence of the melancholy condition of this most oppressed people, it was impossible not to feel the greatest commiseration and grief; for we not only consider ourselves united to them by common ties of humanity, but by those of the same religion. Feeling therefore, that we are invoked by the sacred voice of brotherly love, we declare that we should fail in our duty to ourselves, to God, to our brethren, and to the religion we profess, if we were not deeply moved by a sense of their calamities, and if we did not employ every means in our power, to obtain an alleviation of their unparalleled sufferings. It is on this account that we most earnestly

entreat, and conjure your highness, in the first place, to call to mind the enactments of your serene ancestors, and the concessions which they made and confirmed from time to time in favour of the Waldenses; which concessions were granted, no doubt, in obedience to the will of God, who desires that liberty of conscience should be the inviolable right of every man, and in consideration of the merits of these their subjects, who have ever been found valiant and faithful in war, and obedient in time of peace. And as your serene highness has graciously and nobly trodden in the steps of your predecessors in all other things, we again and again beseech you, that you will not depart from them in this instance, but that you will revoke this edict, and any other that is oppressive to your subjects, in consequence of their professing the reformed religion; that you will restore to them their paternal habitations and property; that you will confirm their ancient rights and privileges; that you will cause reparation to be made for their injuries; and order an end to be put to all vexatious proceedings against them. If your highness will comply with this request, you will do what is most acceptable to God; you will comfort and support the minds of those unhappy sufferers, and you will be conferring a favour upon the neighbouring Protestant states, and especially upon us, who will consider such clemency as the effect of our intercession; which will constrain us to do every kind office in return, and will be the means not only of strengthening, but of renewing and increasing the relations and friendship, which have subsisted between this commonwealth and your dominions. Promising ourselves much from your justice and moderation, we heartily pray God to direct your mind and thoughts, and so to grant you and your people the blessings of peace and truth, and to prosper all your undertakings.

Given at our court at Westminster, the 25th day of May, 1655.

Oliver, Protector

A Letter of His Highness the Lord Protector of England, &c. to the Cantons of the Swisses Professing the Reformed Religion, in Favour of the Poor Protestants of the Valleys of Piedmont.* [* *This is an excerpt from the letter as it appears in Samuel Moreland's History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piemont, London 1658. Reprinted by Church History Research & Archives, 1982. We have italicized Cromwell's roundabout statement implying taking military action if necessary. Cromwell himself considered seeding forces if need be.*]

Most Noble Lords,

... We thought good to write unto you, and to signifie how much we judged it the concernment of us all to help and comfort our exiled and disconsolate Brethren, by such means as shall be thought proper and convenient; and thereby to provide, not onely for the removal of their present evils, but also to prevent their further growth, or any danger which may happen to us all by the example and consequence of this action. Hereupon we have written Letters to the Duke of Savoy, wherein we have entreated him, that of his clemency he would deal more gently with his faithful! Subjects, and restore them (being now almost undone) to their Estates and native countreys. We hope that he will be entreated by our, or rather by the joynt intreaties of us all and that he will readily grant what we so earnestly desire. ***But if he shall appear otherwise minded, we are ready to advise with you about such means as may be most conducing to the redress and relief of these poor innocent men,*** and our dear Brethren in Christ, who groan under so many injuries and oppressions, and which may preserve them from a most certain and causeless destruction, whose safety and preservation, according to your wonted piety, cloth (we are confident) ly very near upon your hearts. Given at our palace at Westminster the 25. of May, 1655.

Your Lordships good Friend **Oliver P.**

On the Late Massacre in Piedmont

By John Milton 1655* [* John Milton, genius of English poetry, was the author of Paradise Lost.]

Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered Saints, whose bones

Lie scatter'd on the Alpine mountains cold,

Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old

When all our Fathers worship't Stocks and Stones

Forget not: in thy book record their groans

Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold

Slayn by the bloody Piedmontese that roll'd

Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans

The vales redoubl'd to the hills, and they

To heav'n. Their martyred blood and ashes sow

O're all th' Italian fields where still doth sway

The triple tyrant: that from these may grow

A hundred-fold, who having learnt thy way

Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

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CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 22: Waldensians: Medieval "Evangelicals"

From Mountain Ghetto to Missionary Diaspora

Waldensians and the Modern Era

Dr. Giorgio Bouchard is currently President of the Protestant Federation of Italy. He is a Waldens-pastor and serves a congregation in Naples. From 1979 to 1986 he was moderator of the Waldensian Church.

At the beginning of the 18th century the situation of the Waldensian Church was something of a paradox. Their centuries-old struggle for survival had succeeded, and no serious menace to the life of the Waldensian people would ever happen again. Yet, despite the gain, all the Waldensian-reformed congregations of the Valleys were still suppressed.

Between 1698 and 1730 thousands of people had been forced to emigrate to Germany. The churches they established are now Lutheran, but still bear the name of *Deutsche Waldenser* (German Waldensians).

Thus the Waldensian Church could survive only in a small corner of Italy: 15 villages, 6,000 poor farmers, seven ministers, a few teachers. The Duke of Savoy (now the King of Sardinia) was tough against this remnant of the Italian Reformation. Hard laws were enforced to make difficult the life of these heretics—if possible to suffocate them.

Enlightenment and Revolution

Yet the Waldensians proved to be able to breathe, even better than the rest of Italian society at that time. During the whole 18th century they established a network of relations with the new Europe of the Enlightenment; these relations were made only too well.

Instead of maintaining their strong Calvinistic heritage, they accepted wholeheartedly the ideas of the Enlightenment (which were contrary to supernatural religion). Their more active young people started to work and trade in Switzerland, Holland, England, even in India, and prospered. In a few words: a Waldensian *bourgeoisie* was born.

By the end of the century a new hope dawned for the Waldensians: the French Revolution. The day on which the French battalions crossed the Alps, the time of Waldensian persecution was over. The Waldensians became citizens with equal rights. No wonder the Waldensians were fond of the Revolution, and later on enthusiastic supporters of Napoleon.

New churches were built, new careers were opened for Waldensian children, and pastors were comfortably paid by the State. **But no endeavor was made in evangelism:** the Enlightenment viewpoint had reduced the love for the Gospel to a cold religion of morals. Like Jonah, the Waldensians needed to spend time "in the belly of the fish" before rediscovering their missionary vocation.

And before long the fish did come to swallow them. In 1815 Napoleon was defeated at Waterloo, and the *Ancien Regime* was restored in Europe. This is known as the *Restoration*. The Waldensians lost their freedom, all their newly acquired rights, and were compelled to go back, hungry and angry, into their small valley "ghetto."

Awakening and Charles Beckwith

In these hard times a rebirth of the Waldensian community happened. In all the Protestant world it was a time of great spiritual awakening, and the revival came from England through Geneva to the Valleys. Children of the converted went to study theology in the best evangelical seminaries, and spread their love for the Bible, and for prayer.

This grass-roots revival received strong support from members of the evangelical wing of the Anglican Church. Holy Trinity College was built in Torre Pellice, as a challenge to the impoverished theology of the Enlightenment. But the strongest support to the Waldensian renewal came in a different and very surprising way: through a young, brilliant officer of the British Army.

Charles Beckwith, born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada, in 1789, had been an aide to General Wellington when he defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. On the day of victory, Beckwith was wounded. His brilliant career was over; at the age of 26 he was a retired man with a wooden leg.

Years after Waterloo, on a visit to his former General, Beckwith found “by chance” (or should we say “by providence”) a book on the Waldensians. The book so interested him that he decided to pay a visit to the Valleys. The visit lasted almost thirty years!

Beckwith supported the evangelical movement among the Waldensians. He also built churches and schools, and sent, at his own expense, the more promising poor young people to study in Lausanne or Geneva. He wanted them to become learned and pious teachers, pastors, and evangelists. He encouraged education in the culture as a strong weapon in the hands of believers, who were called to evangelize a progressive, open society.

And Italy was struggling to become an open and progressive society. On 17 February 1848 the King of Piedmont gave civil rights to the Waldensians. In 1860 the King succeeded in unifying all Italy (with the help of the great popular leader Garibaldi), and a good deal of religious liberty was granted to all.

The Protestant Return

Thanks to the evangelical awakening, and to Charles Beckwith, the Waldensians were ready with numerous pastors, teachers, and evangelists, who spread throughout the country. They built small congregations in the main towns, and opened hospitals, nursing houses, and schools for the poor.

Protestantism was back in Italy to stay. Waldensians were among the leading Protestants in the country, but by no means the only ones. Some small, strong indigenous evangelical movements were born, like the Assemblies of the Brethren (inspired by England’s Plymouth Brethren), or the Italian Evangelical Church.

At the same time a flow of Anglo-Saxon missionaries came to Italy, and small Methodist and Baptist churches were organized around the country. By 1900 a thin network of Protestant congregations and institutions covered the country.

The Waldensian Church was strong. It had organized a Seminary in Florence (since 1922 in Rome), a publishing House, and had large buildings in the major Italian cities. It was also able to take root in the deep South.

At the same time, thousands of Waldensians emigrated to South and North America. In the U.S. they established congregations that went over to other denominations, especially Presbyterian; in South America they built a strong ***Iglesia Evangelica Valdense del Rio de la Plata***—Evangelical Waldensian Church of the Rio Plata area [*see From Snow-covered Peaks to Tropical Forests*].

At the turn of the century, the Waldensians had come to see themselves as national and universal: national, because of their seven-century history, with martyrs spread across all Italy; universal, because they had a strong solidarity with British, American, German, Dutch, and Swiss Protestants. A steady flow of Protestant ideas (and money) helped them to feel like the entitled ambassadors of Protestantism in Italy. Theirs was a religion of the heart, and of ethics, of the Bible, and of the Parliament. They were a Church both progressive and orthodox. A bright future seemed to smile on the Waldensians.

World Wars and Change

All these hopes broke down with World War I. Waldensian troops had to fight against Protestant Germans, and in spite of the big hopes excited by the U.S. president Woodrow Wilson (in every Waldensian village there was a "Wilson Street"), the aftermath of war was bitter.

The Protestant world came into a difficult crisis. In Italy in 1922 the Fascist Regime destroyed the society in which the Waldensian Church was embedded. Finally, in 1929, it gave back to the Roman Catholic Church all the privileges it had lost during the previous century. The Protestants were again reduced to a half-tolerated minority, strictly controlled by the police.

The lot of the Waldensians was not as bad as that of the Methodists, or the Baptists, however, for they were viewed as the "agents of Anglo-Saxon imperialism." Nor did they fare as badly as the new Italian Pentecostals (who went into prison by the hundreds), or the Seventh Day Adventists.

However it was again difficult to breathe. Further, the 1929 American market crisis reduced sharply the financial help that was so important in sustaining the strength of the Waldensian organization. The Waldensians were looking into the future. Maybe change would come soon.

The change did come suddenly and tragically with World War II. In a few years the fascist regime was defeated on the African battlefields; it collapsed in 1943. At that very moment (when the American 5th Army was landing in Salerno) a strong anti-fascist guerrilla movement spread in the North and central region of Italy. Waldensians, both intellectuals and common people, appeared in the front line of this guerrilla movement. Some of their leading Church members were executed or died in concentration camps.

The success of the anti-fascist war helped the Waldensians to find their place in the restored Italian democracy. Since then, they have worked and witnessed as a Church open to social progress. Evangelism and social justice have been their main endeavor during the last 45 years.

Post-War Society

The first decades after the war were characterized by a strong Marxist influence. When this influence started to decline, a new secularism swept the country. Recently, relaxed laws regarding divorce and abortion were accepted through an overwhelming popular vote; the birthrate has fallen in a dramatic way. The old Italy of peasants has disappeared, with a few islands kept for the use of American tourists, and Italy has become a rather sophisticated, industrial country.

In the last ten years, an increasing influx of migrants from Africa and Asia have begun to change the nation's outlook. Also, new evangelical movements have had a strong impact, especially the previously persecuted Pentecostals. Seventh Day Adventists, the Apostolic Church, the Churches of Christ, the Church of the Nazarene, and a lot of smaller evangelical or Pentecostal groups have found followings.

Secularism, and various social changes have presented difficulties for the Waldensians. Another challenge has arisen from unexpected changes inside the Catholic community. A strong "Catholic

reformism" has developed, influenced by modern Protestant theologians such as Karl Barth. This movement has awakened a new interest in Bible study among Catholics.

New Initiatives

The Waldensian Church has decided to respond to these developments through a wide range of initiatives, from a new look at theology to a push for Protestant unity, from a renewal of the old social work emphasis to a new political awareness.

The Waldensian Theological Seminary in Rome has been strengthened in spite of major financial difficulties. The publishing house, Claudiana Editrice, has been widely supported by the Church, in order to provide Italians with the best in Protestant theology, and to give theological backbone to the Waldensian witness. The result of these efforts has been that though they are only 35,000 among the 3,400,000 Protestants in Italy today, the Waldensians are still very influential. Also, increasing dialogue with Roman Catholics is taking place on the basis of a clear theological understanding of the Protestant commitment.

The ecumenical endeavor of the Waldensians has achieved two main results: 1) Union with the Italian Methodist Church in 1979 (94 Waldensian and 37 Methodist congregations now live within the ***Evangelical Waldensian Church***). 2) As of 1967 a ***Federation of the Protestant Churches in Italy*** has been built, with the participation of Waldensians, Methodists, Baptists, Lutherans, the Salvation Army, and some Free Churches.

The Federation runs Protestant radio and television programs, a Sunday School Service, a strong program on behalf of migrants from the Third World, and some emergency relief programs. Efforts are being made also to develop contacts with the growing evangelical churches who are doing a lot of evangelism in Italy.

Italian Waldensians and Methodists have kept their traditional social engagements: there are 131 congregations and 60 social and cultural centers, five hospitals, nine homes for the elderly, many hostels, schools, even cooperatives, and in Sicily, a manufacturing plant. The Agape ecumenical youth center in the Waldensian Valleys is well known, but also of note are the schools in Palermo and Riesi (Sicily), and a Methodist home for unwed mothers in Naples.

Political awareness is also quite strong (and often controversial). The political action of the Waldensians has been concentrated mainly on two points: social justice and religious freedom. On the last point an important result was achieved in 1984 when the Waldensian Church signed the first agreement between the Italian State and a non-Catholic organization.

The President of the Republic paid an official visit to the Waldensian Church in 1986. Newspaper coverage highlighted the Waldensian presence in Italian society, and the Church achieved as never before a high degree of visibility.

The Future Hope

Yet the future of the Waldensian and Methodist union will not rely upon visibility, nor upon social awareness. What will matter is the quality of these believers' spiritual lives.

In spite of some losses due to secularism, the future looks bright. New converts are coming into the Church, bringing new ideas. Women are taking a strong role in the Church (50% of the seminarians are women), and youth organizations are very active.

If these new members of this old tradition become not just "good Waldensians," but true and faithful disciples of the Lord Christ, the Waldensians will continue to carry on their historic witness, and will have (like the Jews in Jeremiah 29:11), "a future and a hope."

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Felix Neff

Apostle of Alpine Awakening

GIORGIO TOURN

When Felix Neff came over the Alps to sound his clarion call for evangelical awakening, his message could not be silenced, not even by the wall surrounding the Church in San Giovanni.

For the fiery and impassioned evangelist the stable life of Waldensian Restoration was a betrayal of all that the Waldensian heritage stood for. In his eyes, what was demanded was a return to the original evangelical vocation. His stay in the Valleys was brief, but explosive.

Chased out by the Sardinian police, he nevertheless left a considerable legacy.

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From Snow-Covered Peaks to Tropical Forests

Waldensians in Uruguay and Argentina

Early in the second half of the last century, a number of Waldensian families left their homeland in the Alps because of the social and economic hardships of the time and settled in the young Latin American nation of Uruguay, and near the border in neighboring Argentina. Settling in the forests in the Rio Plata (River Plate) district, they applied their agricultural skills, and created communities much like the ones they had left in the Alps. Today, after about 130 years, these communities have 24 established churches, and 48 places of worship looked after by 22 ministers. There are approximately 12,547 members of these churches today in Uruguay and Argentina. Together they make up ***The Evangelical Waldensian Church of the Rio Plata***.

The Waldensians contributed to the development of these two Latin countries through their deep religious faith, and also by applying their considerable knowledge of farming. The Rio Plata Church is a rural church. Its administration center, the Casa Valdense, and its social institutions—homes for the elderly, a childrens' home, a home for the disabled, and a social service center—are situated in the areas where the original settlers lived. Having its administrative center in the interior of Uruguay gives the Waldensian Church very special characteristics, since the other Churches there (Protestant as well as Roman Catholic) have their centers in the capital cities of Montevideo and Buenos Aires.

After the development of rural settlements, many families moved to urban centers where new communities were founded—first in the towns of the interior, then in the capitals of Uruguay and Argentina. The Church in Montevideo, Uruguay's capital, was formed to serve the young people who came to the city for university studies. The formation of this Church was of particular importance for it forced the Waldensians to reflect on ways of witnessing to the Gospel in a big city. It also has benefited the rural settlements, since many who have received university training have returned to the interior to work there.

Mission and Social Contributions

The Waldensian community in Argentina's capital city, Buenos Aires, has unusual characteristics since it is a congregation that includes members of the French Reformed, and German and Swiss immigrant communities also. The Evangelical Reformed Church of Buenos Aires is a multi-lingual congregation (Spanish, French, and German). It is a community made up of very different members: from "big city professionals" to uprooted peasants from the country.

Establishing congregations in these capital cities has brought about significant changes in the Church's attitude towards missions. Uruguay is called a "dwarf with the head of a giant," for more than half of its three million inhabitants live in Montevideo. In Argentina the situation is similar: Buenos Aires, like Montevideo, is a seaport city; it has seven million inhabitants. Obviously, work in these cities is very different from that in small interior towns! Helping people deal with the problems of urban life has become a significant part of the mission of the Waldensian Church.

The first contribution of the Waldensian Church to the surrounding society was through its creation of primary schools. A hundred years ago, the first high school in the interior of Uruguay was opened by Waldensians in Colonia Valdense. It was a very important event. Waldensians reproduced in the "new world" what they had many years before accomplished in the Waldensian valleys. They established a central school, several smaller localised schools, and a high-school to guide students to university studies.

These schools, though built upon the evangelical beliefs of the Waldensians, were not limited to Waldensian children. When, in 1927, the government was able to take charge of these schools, the Church handed its education centers over to the Government. Having created centers of education, the Church turned to other social concerns, and established homes for the elderly, for homeless children, and for the disabled.

Politics, Change, and the Future

The Church of the Rio Plata Area has always had the firm intention of being a Church without geographic frontiers, in loyalty to the Waldensian tradition of not being limited or defined by nationality. This separation between church and state became evident when the Rio Plata area went through periods of dictatorial and military control. For the Waldensian Church it was not easy to maintain its unity under the threat of dictatorial governments. There were always people who advocated alliances and agreements with the official authorities. At that point, the strong relationship that had been maintained with the Waldensian Church in Europe was of particular importance for solidarity and support.

In 1965, the Waldensian Church resolved to change the status of the South American congregations, which, up to that time, had been considered a "district" of the Italian Church. The Waldensian Church became one Church subdivided into two areas: The European area, with its annual synod in Torre Pellice, and the river Plate area, celebrating its annual synod in one of the local congregations in either Uruguay or Argentina.

Today, the social problems of the two countries on the Rio Plata raises questions about the life of the Waldensian Church. Uruguay has a birthrate of 50,000 children per year, and statistics indicate that in recent years 50,000 young adults have emigrated per year in search of a better life—for political reasons, and for economic reasons. A potential crisis has been looming for many years over the agriculture of the region; this affects the life of a Church whose main roots are still in agricultural communities.

Argentina has been struck by a series of economic and political crises in which the people have been led to a deep mistrust of institutions. Knowing their country to be one of the world's richest in resources, they are nevertheless faced with the reality of an overwhelming foreign debt. A major food producer, they find they are unable to feed their own children.

The Waldensian Church of the Rio Plata must respond to these and other challenges. To be able to find answers, the Church must reflect upon its past. It must not lose its memory—a memory shaped by an ancient heritage of confessing the Faith in difficult situations.

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

Issue 22: Waldensians: Medieval "Evangelicals"

To A Home in the Land of the Free

The Waldensians in North America

Giuseppe Platene is pastor of the Waldensian Church of Angrogna, Italy, and vice-director of the weekly Waldensian magazine La Luce.

THE FIRST Waldensians in North America arrived in 1656. Having joined with recent Dutch emigrants who were settling "New Amsterdam," these Waldensians were refugees from their native Piedmont after the terrible Piedmont Easter massacre of 1655.

Today there is inscribed on a plaque in Staten Island NY's Borough Hall the words **1657 First Church Erected by Waldensians**. Other witnesses are to be found at the Huguenot Church on Staten Island, where the names of Waldensian families occur in old inscriptions. One of these inscriptions records the work of Pastor David Jourdan de Bonrepos, who emigrated to America after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685.

Due to the lack of documentation it is hard to reconstruct the Waldensian emigration to the New World during the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1850 Mormon missionaries in Italy persuaded 72 persons of the Waldensian valleys to emigrate to Utah. Today hundreds of Mormons in Utah, Arizona, and California have Waldensian names.

In 1875, a group arrived in New York from the Waldensian settlement in Uruguay. Having grown unhappy with the political situation in Uruguay, the group left for New York, where they were directed to Missouri by a pastor of the French Reformed Church. After several years this group affiliated itself with the Presbyterian Church, and in 1878 the Frisco Railroad Company gave the small congregation forty acres of land for a church, a parsonage, and a cemetery.

In 1887 new Waldensian families from the Valleys arrived in the Missouri colony (which had been named Monett). Today descendants of the first Waldensian colonists still live in Monett. The Waldensian Church and cemetery of Monett are in the National Register of Historic Places.

Piedmont of North Carolina

The most important Waldensian settlement in the U.S. today is that of Valdese in Burke County, North Carolina. In May 1893 a group of 29 men, women, and children, reached the place in North Carolina that was immediately named Valdese. Successive waves of immigration brought around 200 persons to the community. In 1920 Valdese was incorporated as a town; the first mayor elected was a native of the Piedmont Valleys.

The Waldensians in Valdese worked in agriculture and in the textile industry. A Waldensian Bakery that was founded remains in operation, with 600 employees. In 1895 the Waldensian church of Valdese became affiliated with the Presbyterian Church. After several years of leadership by Waldensian pastors who had come directly from Italy, the congregation decided to call American pastors and to hold services in English. At present about a third of the 500 members of the Waldensian Presbyterian Church of Valdese are of Waldensian extraction. In some Valdese families both French and the old dialect of the Valleys continue to be spoken.

In 1955 a Waldensian museum was founded in Valdese. Also, every summer in Valdese's open-air

theater a professional drama company acts out the story of the Waldensians. Alexis Ghigou, who arrived in Valdese in 1893 at the age of five with the first group of Waldensian pioneers, celebrated her one hundredth birthday in May 1988—she is a living document of the history of Valdese!

First Stop: New York

For those who arrived from Europe, New York was often the first stop. This city received millions of Italians at the turn of the century, among them an unknown number of Waldensians, perhaps many hundreds. The Waldensians were often able to find work more easily than their compatriots owing to their fluency in Italian and French.

In 1910 the first Waldensian Church in New York was organized. Named the Waldensian Union, the church was located at the Knox Memorial Dutch Reformed Church, with which it came to be affiliated. Ten years later, a hundred or so members split from the Dutch Reformed Church and formed a separate group.

After World War II Pastor Alfredo Janavel was sent by the Waldensian national board to New York. Janavel acquired a property at Manhattan's East 82nd Street, where today the only Waldensian Church (not affiliated with another denomination) in the U.S. is to be found. This Waldensian congregation in New York has today dwindled to about 60 members, most of them elderly, yet it continues to carry on cultural events in French and English, all the while maintaining strong family ties with the Waldensians in the Valleys.

The Waldensians in the U.S. are widely dispersed and have largely been absorbed by several Reformed denominations. Some Waldensian families from Italy and Uruguay emigrated to the San Francisco area of California. A Waldensian presence was also established in Rochester, New York. Around 30 Waldensian families located in Philadelphia. Traces of Waldensians are also to be found in Oregon, Texas, and Illinois.

Waldensians, in the U.S. and across several other continents, though scattered and small in numbers, remain unified in the old biblical motto of their Church: "The light shines in the darkness."

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From the Archives: A Letter From the Poor Lombards to the Poor of Lyons Who Are in Germany (1218)

This letter was sent from Lombardy to Lyons to express the outcome of an early meeting, which was held in Bergamo, Italy, between members of two separate Waldensian groups. Though the two groups differed in their approaches to the life of The Poor, the outcome of the meeting was a "new sense of unity."* [* Some descriptions used in these Archives are derived from those given in the text of Giorgio Tourn's You Are My Witnesses. These documents are taken from Tourn's book.]

We wish, dear brethren, to inform you of the discussions which have been going on for some time with our brethren in France, companions of Valdes, and of the results we have reached together after a long exchange, here in the city of Bergamo in the year of our Lord 1218, in the month of May.

In the first place, regarding the problem of naming leaders in our communities, we agreed to the letter and without dissenting voice that they should be elected; that each community should come together "communarily," as it were, to elect a leader, for life or for a fixed term, whichever should result in the greatest usefulness and make for the most harmony and peace

To our question concerning the ordination of ministers, this was their reply: Ministers should be elected by the community, either among the "Adherents" or the "Friends," and that they may be ordained for life or for a time, according to what seems most useful for all and that serves the cause of peace.

To our question regarding work associations, the reply of our brethren from across the mountains was this: If anyone wishes to make a vow of poverty, either alone or with others, permit him to do so, as he is answerable to God and His law....

To another of their questions, concerning marriage, we gave this answer: We believe that no one should separate legitimately united marriage partners unless it is with the consent of both husband and wife, or for the cause of fornication. This we asked our brethren from across the mountains to believe and profess.

The last question from us was posed in these terms: If the Church should engage and constrain you to engage in practices which, according to your judgment and belief, you believe one cannot clearly justify on the basis of Scripture, are you obliged to obey? Their reply was that they were not obligated and did not wish us to be so obligated. One point of difference between us and the companions of Valdes, however, concerned the breaking or the sacrifice of the bread. As we have verified, their judgment differs from ours

In the first place, some of the companions of Valdes maintain that the substance of the bread and wine is transformed into the body and blood of Christ by the Word of God, adding that the power comes not from men but from God. To this we objected, saying that if the bread and wine are transubstantiated into the body and blood of Christ by the mere mention of the Word of God, it follows that any person, Jew or pagan, could pronounce the Word of God on the bread and wine and, according to this opinion, it would be transformed into the body and blood of Christ. This is absolutely impious, and cannot be sustained by any valid authority and is unreasonable They have acknowledged that the sacrament cannot be performed by women or laymen, but only by the priest. They also said that no one, good or bad, but only He who is God and man, that is, Christ, can transubstantiate the bread and wine into the body and blood

Therefore, very dear brethren, we make appeal to your wisdom, not to forget the following: "Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path" and "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" and "He that believeth on me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." See to it that in you and yours Jesus grows in power, maturity, wisdom and grace, before God and before all men. This be granted to you by Him who, though being Trinity, remains One and reigns forever. Our Society greets you in Christ. Pray for us. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all. Amen.

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From the Archives: Waldensian Legend Concerning the Donation of Constantine to Pope Sylvester (date unknown)

This early document tells in a remarkable and fanciful form the Waldensian story of how the Church had come to compromise with the world. Though The Poor were not around until the 12th century, mention is here made of their presence in the 4th century. They could, however, claim solidarity with ancient Christians who rejected worldly wealth and power.

In the time of Constantine, Pope Sylvester accepted from the king a treasure, whereupon his colleagues protested, saying, "Has not the Lord given us a precept not to possess temporal and material goods? Indeed, did He not say to his disciples that they should 'take neither gold, nor silver, nor money in their purse, neither two coats, nor shoes, nor yet staves,' and that 'the workman is worthy of his hire?'" And did He not also say, 'If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me?' It was indeed so, and we know that Peter said to Him, 'Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee.' "

This same Sylvester, however, spoke otherwise to his brethren: "If you do not go along with me, I will cast you in exile." Upon hearing this his brethren rejoiced, saying among themselves, "Let us praise God, for if indeed earthly benefits are forbidden to us, He will reward us in heaven, for has He not said that 'every one that hath forsaken houses, or brethren, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my name's sake, shall receive an hundred fold, and shall inherit eternal life?'" "

In the night, as they continued the controversy with Sylvester, a voice sounded from heaven, saying, "Today poison has been introduced into the Church of God." Upon hearing this voice, the Poor were confirmed in their position with renewed courage, and they were expelled from the synagogues. Thus was the word fulfilled which said, "They shall put you out of the synagogues: yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service."

And in this wise were the Poor scattered over all the earth. But as they were going, they said to Sylvester, "We leave to you the earth; we shall look to heaven."

They pledged themselves to live in poverty, and for a long time their numbers increased. However, the envy of false Christians was unleashed against them and they were persecuted to the ends of the earth, their enemies declaring, "Let us break their bands asunder."

Our adversaries are indeed lying, for when they claim that the faithful are persecuted only by pagans they are misinterpreting the Scripture. It is very clear that the prophets were not put to death by the heathen, but by their own countrymen. Was not John the Baptist beheaded by Herod? And Jesus Christ Himself, who came to His own and His own received Him not was He not killed? And were not James His brother and many other disciples who were persecuted?

All this was written to serve as a warning to us, to give us examples, as also in the case of Paul. It is thus evident that God's elect must suffer persecution from all sides, from pagans, from their countrymen, from false Christians, and from the whole world, according as our Lord has said: "And ye shall be hated of all men for my name's sake." When it is said "all" it means "without exception."

It is therefore evident that the saints will be persecuted by their brethren to the end of the world. They will not, however, be utterly destroyed. The power of the evil ones has limits, nor does faith fear menaces.

Know ye this, moreover: When the servants of Christ all seemed to have disappeared because of persecution, there rose up, together with a companion, John, a man whose name was Peter of Walle, called the Lyonese, for he was from the city of Lyons. Our adversaries think ill of him because he was expelled from the synagogue. The truth is that he came out as a shoot from a plant watered by the Holy Spirit, and little by little he prospered.

It is said that he was not the founder but the restorer of our community. He was driven out of the synagogue not by the judgment of God, but by men, as happened to others.

This is the man who was the teacher of those called Waldensians, and afterwards, the Poor of Lyons, since they resided for a long time in that city.

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From the Archives: La Nobla Leyczon (The Noble Lesson)

A 15th-century Waldensian poem

O Brethren give ear to a noble lesson,

We ought always to watch and pray,

For we see this world to be near a conclusion,

We ought to strive to do good works,

For we see the end of this world to approach.

A thousand and one hundred years are fully accomplished*

Since it was written thus, "It is the last time,"

We ought to covet little, for we are at the remainder.

We daily see the signs to be accomplished

In the increase of evil and the decrease of good.

These are the perils which the Scripture mentions;

The gospel recognizes it, and Saint Paul writes it, that no man living can know the end,

And therefore we ought the more to fear, for we are uncertain.

If death shall seize us today or tomorrow;

But when Jesus shall come at the day of judgement,

Every one shall receive his full payment.

And who shall have done either ill, or done well.

But the Scripture saith, and we ought to believe,

That all men of the world shall pass two ways.

The good shall go to glory, the wicked to torment.

But he that shall not believe this departure,

Let him search the Scripture from its beginning,
Since Adam was formed, till the present time,
In it he shall find, if he has understanding,
That "few are saved" in comparison to the rest.
But every person who will do good,
The honor of God the Father ought to be his beginning,
And to call the aid of his glorious Son, the Son of Saint Mary,
And the Holy Spirit who gives us the way. These three are the Holy Trinity,
As being one God, ought to be invoked,
Full of all Power, of all Wisdom, and of all Goodness.
For this we ought often to beg and pray
That he give us strength to encounter the enemies,
And overcome them before our end,
Which are the World, the Devil, and the Flesh;
And that he would give us wisdom, accompanied with goodness,
That we may know the way of truth,
And keep pure that soul which God has given us,
The soul and body in the way of charity ...
Now after the apostles were certain teachers,
Who taught the way of Jesus Christ our Saviour;
And these are found even at this present day,
But they are known to very few,
Who have a great desire to teach the way of Jesus Christ,
But they are so persecuted, that they are able to do but little,

So much are the false Christians blinded with error,
And more than the rest they that are pastors,
For they persecute and hate those who are better than themselves,
And let those live quietly who are false deceivers.
But by this we may know that they are not good pastors,
For they love not the sheep, but only for the fleeces.
The Scripture saith, and it is evident,
That if any man love those who are good,
He must needs love God, and Jesus Christ,
Such an one will neither curse, swear, nor lie,
He will neither commit adultery, nor kill;
He will neither defraud his neighbor,
Nor avenge himself of his enemies.
Now such an one is termed a Waldensian, and worthy to be punished,
And they find occasion by lies and deceit,
To take from him that which he has gotten by his just labor.
However, he that is thus persecuted for the fear of the Lord, strengthens himself greatly,
By this consideration, that the kingdom of heaven shall be given him at the end of the world.
Then he shall have a weight of glory in recompense for all such dishonor.
But in this is clearly manifest the malice of those men,
That they who will curse, lie, and swear,
He that will frequently put his money to usury, kill, and avenge himself on those who hate him;
This they say is a good man, and to be accounted faithful ...
For I dare say, and it is very true,
That all the popes that have been from Sylvester to the present,

And all Cardinals, Bishops, Abbots, and the like,
Have no power to absolve or pardon,
Any creature so much as one mortal sin,
It is God alone who pardons, and no other.
But this ought they do who are pastors,
They ought to preach to the people, and pray with them,
And feed them often with divine doctrine, ...
That we may be of the number of his elect to dwell in his courts forever,
Praise be to God. Amen.

[* *The thousand years referred to here is 1,000 years from the so-called Donation of Constantine to Pope Sylvester I in the 4th century. In Waldensian theology, this was a turning point in history where the Church compromised with the world; the event ushered in "the last days."*]

Preserved in Moreland's ***History of the Evangelical Churches of the VALleys of Piedmont*** (London, 1658). This book is available in a facsimile reprint; (***see For Further Reading***).

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From the Archives: A Barba of San Martino (1451)

This is an excerpt from a written account of the heresy trial of Filippo Regis. Waldensians were routinely questioned about their knowledge of the elusive barba—the itinerant Waldensian spiritual leaders. Such accounts are often distorted: it is unlikely a barba would have taught to deny the virgin Birth, or to deny that "the sons" could perform miracles.

Having been interrogated on the charges which had been read to him for his full knowledge, he answered that it was true that he had once made his confession to a barba at his home, a teacher of the sect called the Waldenses, who had been introduced in his house by Stefano Rigotti, of the parish of Usseglio. Asked what was the name of that barba, he answered that he was called "Big Michael" from Freyssinieres; asked if he had seen other barba beside that one, he said that he had: one from Meana, near Susa. Asked the name of the man, he answered that he did not remember. Asked if during his life he had seen other barba, he replied yes: one who was from Puglia, whose name he did not know, but from what he had heard he was from Manfredonia.

Interrogated as to how he knew they were barba of the so-called Waldensian sect, he said that every year they came to the valley, and that the people of the valley were making their confession to them, and that when they were leaving the valleys the barba named him as their delegate, together with Francesco Aydetti of Val Perousa and Val San Maffino. In their name he carried out the task of representing them in this valley, together with Francesco above, receiving confessions from men and women of the so-called Waldensian sect ... and that they had collected money from these Waldensians and given it to this teacher of Manfredonia in Puglia.

Interrogated concerning when—month and day—and where he had gone in Puglia and how much money he had brought, he answered that it was in March of 1443 and 1449, and that the sum was 300 ducats. Asked how they had gone to Puglia and managed not to be recognized, he answered that the aforementioned Francesco disguised himself as a merchant, that he was his helper and that the two went through the town offering their merchandise for sale.

... Interrogated about the teaching he was imparting to the above mentioned people when he was receiving their confessions and when he was preaching to them, he answered that in their confessions he taught that they should not celebrate any feast day of any saint nor that of the Virgin Mary, that such feast days of saints and of Mary were not valid, and that it was not a sin to work on those days. He said that one should not believe in the eucharist, the host, or in the sacrifice at the altar, that at the time of the elevation of the host the body of Christ does not come into it, that it is only bread, and that one should not believe that Jesus was born of a virgin.

Further, that there are only two ways open to all and which determine whether one will be saved or will be condemned, i.e., one who does good will go to paradise, and one who does evil will go to hell and damnation; purgatory does not exist. Indeed, whoever believes in purgatory is condemned already. Further, charities after one's death should not be done, for charities after death have no value; that they do not profit the one who does them if they are not done before death . . . That Mary, the son, the saints, have no power to perform miracles or signs or answer prayer, but only God; that all things performed in churches have no value and no bearing; it would be much better that they should be performed in stables rather than in churches....

From the Archives: Subjects Discussed at the Meeting at Angrogna (or, the Confession of Chanforan) 1532

There is debate today among historians of Waldensianism as to whether one epoch-making meeting really took place in the little hamlet of Chanforan, located in the vicinity of Angrogna in the Piedmont Alps. Traditionally it has been held—as is the position expressed in this issue by Dr. Bouchard—that a crucial meeting took place at Chanforan at which the Waldensians more or less decided to accept William Farel's position concerning their joining the reform movement, and that they produced the Confession printed below; also that a translation of the Bible into French was commissioned at that time. A recent scholarly study by Oxford-trained historian Euon Cameron has argued that, according to the best information we have today, the best we can say is that several meetings took place at different places around the time, and that the document below was produced at one of these meetings held near Angrogna. Cameron suggests that the traditional view was a later imposition on the facts, and that it makes the Waldensians and the early reformers out to be far more organized and unified than is historically justifiable. Whether such a meeting took place or not, the Waldensians did become a part of the Calvinistic Reformed tradition, and have since been regarded as Protestants.

Made with general consent by the ministers and heads of Families of the Churches of the Valleys of the Piedmont, assembled in Angrogna the 12th of September of the Year 1532.

The following articles having been framed, read, approved, and signed by all that were present, they with one accord did swear to believe, hold and observe them inviolably, as agreeing with the holy Scriptures, and containing the sum of the Doctrine which was taught them from father to son according to the Word of God....

Article 1. That divine service cannot be performed but in spirit and in truth: because God is a Spirit, and whosoever will speak to him must do it in spirit.

2. All those that have been, and shall be saved, have been elected of God, before the foundation of the world.

3. It is impossible that those who have been appointed to salvation, should not be saved.

4. Whosoever upholds Free-Will denieth absolutely Predestination, and the Grace of God.

5. No work is called good, but that which God hath commanded, and no work is bad but that which he forbiddeth.

6. A Christian may swear by the Name of God without contravention of what is written, Matt. 5, provided that he that sweareth doth not take the Name of God in vain. Now it is not in vain, when the oath tendeth to God's glory, and to the good of a man's Neighbor: moreover, one may swear before Magistrates, because he that exerciseth the office of Magistrate, whether a believer or unbeliever, holdeth his power from God.

7. Auricular confession is not commanded of God, and it hath been determined according to holy

Scripture, that the true Confession of a Christian is, to confess to God alone, to whom belongeth honor and glory; there is another kind of Confession, which is when one reconcileth himself to his Neighbor The third manner of Confession is, when one having offended publicly, and to every man's knowledge, doth also publicly confess and acknowledge offense.

8. We ought to cease on the Lord's Day from our Works, as men zealous of the honor and glory of God, also out of Charity towards our Servants, and to apply ourselves to the hearing of the Word of God.

9. It is not lawful for a Christian to take Revenge upon his Enemy in any manner whatsoever.

10. A Christian may exercise the office of Magistrate over other Christians.

11. There is no certain determination of time for any Christian Fast, and it cannot be found in the Scripture, that God hath commanded and appointed any special Days.

12. Marriage is not forbidden to any, of what quality and condition soever he be.

13. Whosoever forbiddeth Marriage teacheth a Diabolical Doctrine.

14. Whosoever hath not the gift of chastity is bound to marry.

15. The Ministers of the Word of God ought not to remove from place to place, except it be for some great good to the Church.

16. It is not a thing repugnant to the Apostolic Communion, that Ministers should possess some Estate proper to themselves, for the subsistence of their families.

17. Concerning the matter of the Sacraments, it hath been determined by the holy Scripture, that we have but two Sacramental Signs left us by Jesus Christ; the one is Baptism, the other is the Eucharist, which we receive, to show that our perseverance in the Faith is such as we promised when we were baptized being little children, and moreover, in remembrance of that great benefit given to us by Jesus Christ, when he died for our Redemption, and washed us with his precious Blood.

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From A Calabrian Prison (1560)

An excerpt from a letter of Waldensian pastor Giovan Paschale, who was hanged in Rome in 1560.

To the brethren of San Sisto,

... we are 80 to 100 persons held in this dark place, and although we may escape being devoured by the lice, we are at the same time near to death by hunger. Who will doubt that all of us would willingly forego all that we possess in this world rather than to be condemned forever to this misery?...

Some will say that they do not sense in themselves the strength to die for Jesus Christ. I reply to them that those who fear to be overcome ought at least to struggle and to achieve a fleeting victory. For to flee is permissible, but to bow the knee before Baal is forbidden under the penalty of eternal punishment

I can testify that with a little bread and water the body can be satisfied, whereas the soul will never find satisfaction until it finds food which nourishes the hope of eternal life. And what is that if it is not the preaching of the Holy Gospel, of which you may be deprived? If, therefore you desire satisfaction, prepare yourselves to go to the place where your soul is peaceful. Thus you will quieten your conscience, you will find rest, you will confess Jesus Christ, you will edify the Church, and you will confound your enemies.

Your brother in Jesus Christ,

Giovan Luigi Paschale

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The Waldensians: Recommended Resources

Various works have been done in Italian and French, but few books on the Waldensians have been released in English since the last century. The most important of these are mentioned below, and have been reprinted by AMS Press in New York. Two modern works in English are listed below: Cameron's book covers one century and is a scholarly work done at Oxford University; Tourn is an Italian Waldensian historian, who is himself a Waldensian pastor. His book is the best modern, introductory history, or general survey of the whole Waldensian story; newly updated, expanded, with many illustrations. We highly recommend it.

Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps 1780–1580*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984.

Emilio Comba, *History of the Waldenses of Italy*, (reprint of original 1889 edition published by Truslove & Shirley, London), AMS Press Inc, New York, 1978.

Pius Melia, *The Origin, Persecutions, and Doctrines of the Waldensians*, (reprint of original edition published by James Toovey, London), 1870, AMS Press Inc, 1978.

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