

Medieval Sourcebook: The Conversion of Peter Waldo

And during the same year, that is the 1173d since Lord's Incarnation, there was at Lyons in France a certain citizen, Waldo by name, who had made himself much money by wicked usury. One Sunday, when he had joined a crowd which he saw gathered around a troubadour, he was smitten by his words and, taking him to his house, he took care hear him at length. The passage he was reciting was the holy Alexis died a blessed death in his father's house. When morning had come the prudent citizen hurried to the schools of theology to seek counsel for his soul, and when he was taught many ways of going to God, he asked master what way was more certain and more perfect than all others. The master answered him with this text: thou wilt be perfect, go and sell all that thou hast," etc

Then Waldo went to his wife and gave her the choice of keeping his personal property or his real estate, namely, he had in ponds, groves and fields, houses, rents, vineyards, mills, and fishing rights. She was much displeased at having to make this choice, but she kept the real estate. From his personal property he made restitution to those whom he had treated unjustly; a great part of it he gave to his little daughters, who, without their mother's knowledge he placed in the convent of Font Evrard; but the greatest of his money he spent for the poor. A very great famine was then oppressing France and Germany. The prudent citizen, Waldo, gave bread, with vegetables and meat to every one who came to him for three days in every week from Pentecost to the feast of St. Peter's bonds. At the Assumption of the blessed Virgin, casting some money among the village poor, he cried, "No man can serve two masters, God and mammon." Then his fellow-citizens ran up, thinking he had lost his mind. But going on to a higher

place, he said. " My fellow-citizens and friends, I not not insane, as you think, but I am avenging myself on my enemies, who made me a slave, so that I was always more careful of money than of God, and served the creature rather than the Creator. I know that many will blame me that I act thus openly. But I do it both on my own account and on yours; on my own, so that those who see me henceforth possessing any money may say that I am mad, and on yours, that you may learn to place hope in God and not in riches."

On the next day, coming from the church, he asked a in citizen, once his comrade, to give him something to eat for God's sake. His friend, leading him to his house, "I will give you whatever you need as long as I live." When this came to the ears of his wife, she was not a little troubled, and as though she had lost her mind, she ran to the archbishop of the city and implored him not to let her husband beg bread from any one but her. This moved all present to tears.

[Waldo was accordingly conducted into the presence of the bishop.] And the woman, seizing her husband by the throat, said, "Is it not better, husband, that I should redeem my sins by giving you alms than that strangers should do so? " And from that time he was not allowed to take food from any one in that city except from his wife.

from an Anonymous Chronicle written about 1218 and translated in J. H.

Robinson, *Readings in European History*, (Boston: Ginn, 1905), pp. 381-383

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Waldensian History

A Brief Sketch

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Introduction

This is merely an overview of Waldensian history, based primarily on the sources noted below. I also include personal observations from years of studying medieval history and heresy.

For a more complete history, see Gabriel Audisio's book, *The Waldensian Dissent, Persecution and Survival c.1170-c.1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999) ISBN 0 521 55984 7 (paperback) or 0521 55029 7 (hardback). This is a sound, fair, sympathetic, and highly readable Waldensian history. Other histories abound, but they are either biased, ignore important recent published research, or are more scholarly and detailed than the average reader seeks-and in a foreign language. Audisio provides references to other materials for those who desire more detail. Except as noted, the sketch below follows Audisio.

The following fairly recent Waldensian histories are also worth reading:

Cameron, Euan. *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps, 1480-1580* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984). Cameron's claims about the dating and meaning of the synod at Chanforan in 1532, where the decision was made to adhere to the Reformation, has not been accepted by other historians. Further, he limits too severely the sources of information he is willing to consider. This attempt to eliminate sources that may bias his findings results in an unfortunate counter-bias that skews some of his conclusions. It is primarily useful for the detail about Waldensians in the Dauphiné (eastern France).

Stephens, Prescott. *The Waldensian Story: A Study in Faith, Intolerance and Survival*. (Lewes, Sussex: The Book Guild Ltd, 1998) ISBN 1 85776 280 0. When in stock, available in

the U.S. through the American Waldensian Society, P.O. Box 744, Whitehall, PA 18052. Some of the early sections suffer from a tendency toward apologetics (defending a cause-in this case the Waldensians-beyond what the evidence supports). For later periods, his treatment is more balanced and he is willing to discuss the occasional Waldensian weaknesses as they dealt with their challenges. Covers to the present, much beyond where Audisio leaves off. Very readable.

Tourn, Giorgio. *You Are My Witnesses* (Torino: Claudiana, 1989). Available in the U.S. through Friendship Press, PO Box 37844, Cincinnati OH 45222; (513) 948-8733. Ignores research published in the 1960s and 1970s and at times tends toward apologetics (see above) and therefore isn't as objective as history should be. But highly readable and informative.

If you wish to read one or more of these but prefer not to buy them, your nearest library that belongs to the Interlibrary Loan system should be able to obtain a copy to check out to you.

THE EARLY PERIOD

Historical Accounts-Then and Now

Let's begin with a comment of my own. Many of the older Waldensian histories speak of them as a body of Christians, hiding in the Alps from the days of the original apostles, or at least from the time of Claude, archbishop of Turin. But the eminent French historian Jean-Pierre Poly has shown that from 883 until 972-nearly a century-Saracen pirates fully controlled southeastern France and the Alpine passes. All inhabitants of

the areas later known as the Waldensian Valleys were swept off. There simply could not have been a continuous group there.

Those older histories make many unsupported (and unsupportable) claims for the Waldensians. But during this past century, historians interested in the Waldensians have (1) discovered new documents, (2) compared and contrasted more carefully the surviving relevant documents from various countries, (3) used more formal logical methods to assess an author's purpose in creating a document, and (d) used other disciplines such as linguistics to analyze and interpret those documents. The result is a more reliable history.

Beginnings

All serious historians now agree that the Waldensian movement began in Lyons about 1170. Claims to greater antiquity came much later and are unfounded, as will be shown.

It is now also universally agreed that the founder's name was not Peter Waldo; he was never called Peter until some 150 years after his death; reasons for ascribing that name to him will also be presented later.

The form of his name currently accepted is either Vaudes or Valdes, depending on how the particular scholar interprets the amount of influence the northern "French" language had on the southern "Provençal" language in Lyons at the time. We'll use the form Valdes here, as the "l" sound is maintained in the current name Waldensian and will therefore be more familiar.

And, until joining the Protestant Reformation in the 1500s, his followers never called themselves "Waldensians." That term was applied to them by those who sought to destroy them and therefore carried pejorative connotations. Rather, they consistently referred to themselves as the "Poor of Christ," the "Poor of Lyons," the "Poor in Spirit," or more simply "Brothers."

About 1170, Valdes, a wealthy merchant of Lyons, had a life-changing experience. There are several versions of the experience, but they center on his sudden awareness of Christ's injunction to the rich young man, "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" (Matt. 19:16-21).

Deeply touched, Valdes arranged for his wife's welfare, placed his daughters at the abbey of Fontevault-which bespeaks his means-paid two clerics to translate portions of the New Testament and some maxims from the early church fathers (Augustine, Jerome, Ambrose, and Gregory) into Franco-Provencal, and began preaching.

Key Early Characteristics

The basic points of his efforts, which persisted until the Reformation, were (1) the literal interpretation of the Bible, (2) genuine poverty, and (3) preaching.

By the twelfth century, the Catholic clergy consisted of members of the higher classes, often younger sons who had little if any chance of having any other inheritance. The clergy had long been highly politicized, and positions could be bought-or wrested by force. The higher classes, whether in public or religious stations, were used to a life of ease. They couldn't relate to the common people and, whenever natural disasters or other situations made life difficult, the common people could easily resent a life style they had to support but couldn't enjoy. Further, the clergy used Latin, little understood by the common people, and their training inclined them to philosophy and entangled logic in interpreting the Bible, which, again, the common people did not understand.

The people were now given the chance to contrast their typically indifferent, often indolent priests and bishops with these poor but fervent preachers who quoted the Bible in their own language, preachers who could relate to their own personal struggles. It is not difficult to see how

Valdes and his followers won their allegiance. He attracted many followers.

From about 1175 to 1184, the Poor put their preaching appeal to use in southern France, the center of another widespread, older heresy, Catharism. For the reasons noted above, they were far more effective in public debate with the Cathars (also called Albigensians) than were the Catholic clergy. At this early time, the Poor as preachers preferred population centers, where there were larger numbers to preach to, and appealed widely to the upper classes.

Attempt at Internal Adjustment

But Valdes was not trying to establish a different church. He had no interest in having a religious title, nor in heading up even his own group. Instead, he was trying to get the Catholic clergy to return to the model of Christ, as shown in the New Testament. This is convincingly indicated by a document called Valdes' "Profession of Faith," which is thoroughly Catholic and orthodox.

In 1179, a small delegation, undoubtedly including Valdes himself, went to the Third Lateran Council. The pope was impressed enough that he supported their emphasis on poverty and gave oral permission for them to preach, subject to the approval of local authorities.

Clerical Reactions

The new archbishop of Lyons, however, was not anxious to have Valdes and his group put the local clergy in a bad light, nor was he willing to share the prestige and power that always accompanied preaching in a day when few could read and few were authorized to speak in public. Those two forms of communication, reading and speaking, provided genuine power-then and now.

Rather than stop preaching, which they felt was a divine injunction, Valdes and his followers were driven from Lyons. They went, naturally,

where they could preach: southern France, northern Italy, Burgundy, Lotharingia. They established followers in all these locations.

But because he refused to bow to local interdictions against preaching, in 1184 Valdes and his followers were excommunicated as "schismatics" (disobedient), rather than as "heretics." Thus, the church hoped to have them change their views and return, and Valdes and his followers hoped to have the excommunication overturned. They continued preaching and, despite the excommunication, some Catholic bishops still debated publicly with them as late as 1207. And the Poor of Lyons still preached in public, in at least some places, as late as 1228.

But about 1205 or 1207, Valdes died, perhaps in Bohemia. After the Council of Pamiers in 1207, some of the Poor of Lyons returned to the Catholic Church, which authorized a new order, the "Poor Catholics." The leader of this returning group was Durand of Huesca, who had been one of Valdes' associates. But not many Waldensians followed Durand's example.

Persecution Begins

In 1208, a systematic crusade began against the Cathars (also called Albigensians, after their center at Albi), and it lasted some twenty years. This crusade destroyed many of the Poor of Lyons in the area as well.

In 1215, "anathema" (condemnation) was pronounced upon them by the Fourth Lateran Council. They were now officially heretics. Yet the Roman Church had learned a useful lesson from these early dealings with the Poor of Lyons, and dealt differently with later calls for poverty, such as that of St. Francis of Assisi.

Expansion

By about this time, the missionary efforts of the Poor had reached eastward into Provence (southeastern France), the comtat Venaissin, Burgundy, Franche-Comté, the borders of Lorraine and Alsace (all in eastern France), and Lombardy. Although there was as yet no national

language (French), all these areas spoke a form of French that posed few if any problems to the preachers.

A Poor of Lyons document of 1218, related to a discussion held at Bergamo, shows a split between two groups of the Poor, both in northern Italy. The group in Lombardy had proceeded more toward a formal organization, and there were eight other items of disagreement between them and the group in the Alps. Three representatives from each group met together and came to agreement on seven of the nine dividing issues.

THE INQUISITION: INTENSIFIED PERSECUTION

The Inquisition and Clandestinity

The Inquisition began in 1231. At first it targeted only the preachers, not their followers. The feeling was that the followers would return to the Roman church if they were taught properly, so the effort was to remove those who raised questions in the people's minds. The centers of the Poor in southwestern France had to be abandoned, and the movement changed from public preaching and from an urban society to a rural one. Because they could no longer safely preach where the titled and wealthy were, the Poor stopped attracting the upper classes. After 1250, there are no signs of the Poor living in the towns of Burgundy, Gascony, and Rouergue, previously among their centers.

Intense persecution led to clandestinity, a direct contraction to the fervent feeling of Valdes that the gospel should be preached openly, as the apostles had done. But the group faced a choice: continue preaching and all die, or accommodate to circumstances and perpetuate the movement. A few remained preachers, but not openly so, while most settled into a regular lifestyle, marrying and working as craftsmen, farmers, and herdsmen to support their families. The focus became to perpetuate the group, rather than to increase it through converts.

Beliefs of the Poor

The documents of their persecution show them to have been staunchly against telling falsehoods or taking oaths for any reason, as well as opposing the notion of purgatory. This Catholic doctrine, not at all a biblical idea, was only fixed in 1274; until 1255 it wasn't even considered heretical to oppose it.

These same documents indicate that the Poor believed in confession and Donatism (the idea that the validity of the sacraments hinges on the worthiness of the priest; that is, an unworthy priest cannot perform a valid sacrament). This also led them to reject belief in the intercession of saints, as some of these had been canonized by "unworthy" popes.

Except for these items-and of course the persistent beliefs about poverty and preaching, using the Bible in the popular tongue-the group "acted" Catholic.

The Question of Authority

But charges of "newness," raised by the clergy, and by the Inquisition in particular, were unsettling. In that day, antiquity was considered evidence of being the "correct" church. Those charges gave rise to attempts by the preachers to link the Poor to earlier dissents and, finally, to the apostles themselves. But much of this claim depended upon a document, the "donation of Constantine," which was shown much later to have been falsified. There is today no shred of evidence to push the Waldensian movement beyond Valdes himself. Even if some of his early converts had previously been, or descended from, earlier dissenters, these dissents did not reach beyond the previous century at most. There simply is no thread linking the Poor back to a "purer" church. But that does not diminish their devotion to trying to live as they understood the Bible intended them to live.

Modifications

Audisio further points out that by the 1500s, the development of a merchant and banking class in society had changed the view of the Poor

about poverty. They no longer sought to give away all they had to the poor. They had to be concerned about the transmission of family goods from one generation to the next-of providing for their children. And they had to conform to such cultural practices as dowries. Analysis of their wills shows them to have been more generous than their Catholic counterparts, and less inclined to be concerned with accumulating wealth.

I personally think this attitude was deeply ingrained in the Poor long before the economic developments Audisio mentions. If Audisio is correct that some of the first generations of preachers continued to preach but that most settled down, married, and raised families, that very change would modify the inclination to give away all and to live by donations only. Such people would have had to devote much of their effort to providing for their families, including legacies for heirs. Still, devotion to principle to the degree found among the Poor would also find them generous, according to their means, in supporting those who chose to remain preachers. That attitude would extend to caring for the poor.

Another Crusade

In 1487, Cattaneo began his two-year crusade against the Poor in Dauphine. Cameron provides convincing evidence that Cattaneo and his assistants were not motivated by religious convictions, but rather by greed. They confiscated lands and then charged illegal fees for the Poor to avoid penalties or to have reversed those penalties already imposed. But the area was devastated. Many of the Poor fled to Provence, and groups also went to southern Italy.

THE REFORMATION

Contact with the Reformation

The first evidence of contact with the Reformation appears about 1523. Some of the preachers, called barbas by then in the Alpes and Provence, wondered if the transmission of their beliefs over centuries, their

adherence to the Bible message, was still accurate. The first inquiries revealed substantial differences on such key matters as Calvinistic ideas of predestination, the role of preachers or ministers, and clandestinity. The Poor had always felt that works were an essential part of living the gospel, but predestination rejected the value of works.

The Reformation had ministers marrying, settling down and owning land, which rejected the original and still-maintained value among the Poor of having the preachers remain unmarried and landless. This had permitted the preachers to devote all their time and energy to their itinerant ministry. And the Reformers were shocked at what they considered the hypocrisy of the Poor in keeping their worship hidden from the authorities so as to avoid persecution as much as possible.

In 1532, a synod of barbas decided to adhere to the Reformation, although the decision was not unanimous. Two barbas even traveled to Bohemia in hopes of getting support from that branch of the Poor, but their effort had no effect on the decision.

Major Change

Audisio raises the question of what would cause the people to make such an abrupt rupture with their centuries-old past, and isn't fully satisfied with answers he can infer.

I suppose that some of the barbas became confused at the articulate arguments of those of their number who had more education and prior contact with the Reformation. I suspect that a significant consideration also was the persistent danger they faced. The Inquisition had been quite effective in eliminating a number of them. Tortured, they ultimately identified the homes they had stayed in, and that meant the families who previously had hosted the traveling barbas had either fled or been arrested as well. Perhaps some of the barbas therefore saw a dim future, and the power of the Reformation in Switzerland, the German states, and elsewhere may have seemed like a refuge.

Whatever the reasons, the formal decision did not result in immediate adherence to the Reformation in everyday life. Not until 1555-1560 does evidence of the Reformation appear in the personal lives of the Poor. In essence, a whole generation passed before the change started to be evident in practice.

It would be interesting to know how the Poor, those who had been among the group for generations, reacted to the conversion of most of their neighbors in the Alpine Valleys. And how did they feel about the erection of formal buildings of worship, in place of the traditional secret meetings in the open or, for smaller groups, in homes? The openness increased their numbers, but being more visible also made them seem more of a threat and increased their persecution.

The End?

To Audisio, adherence to the Reformation marked the end of the Poor as a religious movement-for he considers them not yet to have effected a formal organization. To him, they abandoned their primary tenets: living by the Bible without dependence on intricate analysis or philosophy; poverty; and preaching, which had meant nurturing rather than directing the flock-being shepherds rather than shepherders, we might say. Further, they abandoned their native tongue, a Provençal dialect; to him, they abandoned their identity.

Whereas they had always previously resisted organizing as a "church," in 1558 they adopted a church organization based on the Genevan model. Later they modified it to conform more to the French-style synodal system. And they came to accept being called Waldensians, which the Reformation turned from an aspersion to a compliment.

Audisio doesn't explore another facet of the change. I find it intriguing that, up to their adherence to the Reform, one reason the Poor had distrusted the Catholic clergy was because of their learning in philosophy and rhetoric. This, the Poor felt, gave rise to complicated attempts to

interpret and explain the scriptures. Yet it wasn't long after they adopted the Reform before their own pastors received just such higher education. This education took place in Switzerland and was Protestant rather than Catholic, to be sure. But they abandoned their centuries-held belief that it was not necessary-in fact, wasn't even desirable-to have university training in order to understand and preach the gospel.

Audisio emphasizes that the Waldensians survived as an ethnic and cultural group, even though they had thoroughly changed their religious identity. For him, it is erroneous to speak of the "Waldensian Church" as having survived for eight centuries.

(The procedure in his historical analysis is to clearly identify the earliest characteristics of the Poor, compare them to the characteristics after full adoption of the Reformation, and let the comparison logically indicate whether it was the same "church." It is an interesting approach. I wonder what the result would be if he applied the same criteria to an analysis of the early Christian Church: Would he then logically conclude that the Christian Church of the fourth or fifth century-or any later century-survived as a cultural entity and as ethnic groupings, but was not at all the same "Church" as Christianity in the first century?)

There is some evidence in defense of Audisio's conclusions about the Waldensians. The records show much of a tendency toward that direction. Yet the change wasn't complete, and it certainly wasn't unanimous. The parish registers still show signs in the early 1700s of the Provençal dialect. And family histories passed down in my own family reveal serious family discussion in the mid-1800s about whether or not adhering to the Reformation had really been the proper decision. These ancestors, and other Waldensians around them, still discussed one of the fundamental issues raised at Bergamo in 1218: the question of authority.

THE COUNTER-REFORMATION: TURBULENT TIMES

The Counter-Reformation

But let us continue our survey of their history. For a century after 1560, the Waldensians experienced severe pressure from the Catholic Counter-Reformation. From 1540, persecution of Waldensians in Provence intensified, leading to the infamous massacre at Merindol in 1545. In 1560, the Waldensian settlements in Calabria were destroyed. Many of these families had fled Dauphiné during Cattaneo's crusade some seventy years earlier.

In 1561, the Agreement at Cavour was supposed to grant the Waldensians the right to worship. But the agreement was not properly ratified, thus providing a loophole the clergy used without end to try to force their will on the people. The practical result was that Waldensians could not live nor own land outside the restricted territory of their native valleys.

The Plague

In the early 1630s, the plague decimated their population. The notarial records provide evidence of the devastating effect on families. And the plague took eleven of their thirteen pastors as well. They had to call upon Geneva for more ministers, and this appears finally to have completed the transition to the Reformation camp.

The "Piedmont Easter"

In April 1655, the Waldensians were ordered to quarter the ducal troops. Early on Easter morning, at a given signal, these troops arose and brutally murdered and pillaged their hosts. This became known as the Piedmont Easter, and led the English poet Milton to write his famous sonnet, "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont," about the "slaughtered saints."

A small band, under the leadership of Josuè Janavel, a local farmer, began guerilla raids that kept the people from total annihilation and

absorption into Catholicism. In August, the duke was compelled to treat for peace, but one price was that Janavel and his band were exiled.

Revocation of the Edict of Nantes

In 1685, Louis XIV of France, who wanted to be called the "Sun King" (to outdo the ancient pharaohs, who were only "sons of the sun"), revoked the Edict of Nantes. That edict, established in 1598, had guaranteed French Protestants the right of worship. The revocation decreed that it was illegal for Protestants to live within the country but also forbade them from leaving, another attempt at forced conversion to Catholicism. Many fled to exile, despite the law.

The Duke of Savoy at the time, Victor Amadeus II, was the nephew of Louis XIV. In January 1686, he succumbed to his uncle's pressure and issued a decree paralleling the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes. The Waldensian pastors were expelled, Waldensian worship was forbidden, and all children were to be baptized Catholics.

Waldensian Response

On March 6, the Waldensians defied the order and, on the basis of Acts 4:19 (it is better to obey God than man), resumed worship services. The duke, of course, was not pleased. Six days later, the Waldensians met at Roccapiatta. The pastors, with the Swiss delegates who had come to plead their cause before the duke (unsuccessfully), tried to persuade the people to accept exile. This time, except for the small Swiss delegation, the Protestant nations were not intervening with the duke. The people had all but decided to accept his counsel. But one of the pastors, Henri Arnaud, gave such an impassioned appeal that they changed their minds. He convinced them that God would be with them and would use them to bring about the final destruction of their tormentors.

Death and Imprisonment

Arnaud meant well, but it seems to have been a poor decision. Without substantial Protestant pressure on the duke, military action lasted just

three days. Tourn estimates that more than 2000 Waldensians were killed in those three days. Some capitulated and became, in name, Catholic. About 8500 were herded off to fifteen detention centers. These consisted of fortresses, prisons, and old castles. They were not provided food, water, or shelter, for the intent was their entire extermination. Tourn reports that of 1400 in the dungeon at Carmagnola, only 400 survived; of some 1000 at Trino, only forty-six survived.

The Unconquerables

The duke's forces felt they had taken care of the Waldensian problem because they had combed the mountains, routing out those who resisted or were found hiding. Soon, however, a few they had missed began guerilla raids again. They became known as the "Unconquerables." The duke had intended to repopulate the Waldensian areas with dependable Catholics, but found it difficult to achieve. The Waldensians had proven so durable over the centuries that many Catholics doubted they could permanently hold the land.

Exile

The cruelty of the affair again aroused international indignation. Under intense pressure from the Protestant nations, the duke finally agreed in January, 1687 to perpetual exile for the survivors. But he wanted them moved far beyond his borders, to northern Germany.

Thirteen groups of survivors were released from their prisons, the first leaving Piedmont on 17 January and the last reaching Geneva on 10 March. That is not an easy time of year for someone in good health to cross the Alps, and those surviving the imprisonment were no longer robust. Tourn reports that of 2700 who began the trek into exile, 2490 actually reached Geneva. This means that, on average, one person died per mile. In addition, many children were kidnapped, to be placed in Catholic families.

Once in exile, the Swiss were unable to convince the Waldensians to make permanent settlements. In addition, they needed much care and the burden was heavy. Some were sent into Germany, easing the load somewhat.

FROM THE "GLORIOUS RETURN" TO THE PRESENT

The "Glorious Return"

On 17 August 1688, a commando force began what has become known as the "Glorious Return." The troop lost 30% of its thousand-man force just in making the 130-mile return to their homeland. They had to move quickly, yet many were still weak. This time, they used Janavel's military manual, based on his 1655 experience, which had been disregarded at such high cost in 1685.

By 2 May 1689, only 300 Waldensian troops remained and they were cornered on a high peak, called the Balsiglia. Arrayed against them were 4000 French troops with cannons. The final assault, however, was delayed by storm and then by cloud cover. The French commander was so confident, he sent a message to Paris that the Waldensian force had been destroyed. But when the French prepared for their final assault the next morning, the Waldensians were nowhere to be found. During the night, guided by one of their number familiar with the Balsiglia, they had made a completely impossible descent and were miles away.

A few days later, with the Waldensian force still in most dangerous circumstances, the duke suddenly severed his alliance with France and joined with England and Austria. For political reasons, the exiles were invited to come home. The vacillating duke needed these intrepid mountain folk to help protect his borders against the French.

The Second Exile

A second exile took place shortly after the war with France ended. As part of the peace accord, Louis XIV demanded that the duke stop giving

"refuge and protection" to French Protestants. The intent was to force them all back to France, to become Catholic.

Although some French Huguenots had taken refuge in the Valleys, the great injustice of the demand lay in the fact that in the peace treaty, France and Savoy had exchanged certain areas. Because of that, many French Waldensian families had become subject to Savoy and, under terms of the treaty, now had to leave the very homes their ancestors had held for centuries.

The result was that in 1698, some 2,000 "French" Waldensians left the Valleys, most of them forever. They traveled through Switzerland into Germany, where they established permanent settlements. Over time, some left Germany for other lands.

Devastation

But even for the non-French inhabitants of the Valleys, who numbered more than the French exiles, life was most difficult. The land was a wilderness. The area had not yet recovered from the military action in 1685. The villages were still essentially destroyed. Further, the duke's representatives soon found ways of harassing the Waldensians again. In hopes of enticing Waldensians to convert, Catholics were not taxed, while Waldensian taxes were increased to make up the difference. Waldensians could not purchase land outside their three restricted, traditional valleys. A fund was set up to help Catholics purchase the Waldensian lands in default because of the heavy tax burden. As the population grew, all this created enormous economic pressures.

Napoleonic Influence

The French Revolution resulted in the Napoleonic Empire (1804-1815), and Napoleon granted some relief to the Waldensians. He closed the infamous "home for Waldensian children," in which kidnapped or enticed children had been raised as Catholics, their parents not even permitted to visit them. And a Waldensian church was built in San Giovanni, a town

previously outside the approved area. But Napoleon also made the Waldensian Church a part of the French Protestant movement.

The Waldensian Ghetto

When Napoleon fell in 1815, the duke returned and so did the repressive rules. Charles Beckwith, an English officer who had lost a leg at Waterloo, retired to the Valleys and wielded enormous influence in helping the Waldensians rise above their "ghetto" status. His primary contribution was the building of local schools. As a result, illiteracy was substantially reduced in the Valleys.

Freedom at Last

The political scene was changing. Savoy had been an independent principality for about 800 years, but now became part of Italy. Responding to the political pressure, particularly at the grass-roots level, the duke having become king of Sardinia, issued a declaration on 17 February 1848, granting Waldensians full rights of citizenship. For the first time in centuries, Waldensians could hold public office, choose the profession they wished, and acquire land; and their children could qualify for higher education. But the declaration failed to provide greater religious freedom. Still, it was the beginning of that process. At receiving the news, the Waldensian villages celebrated by building bonfires, visible all up the mountainside.

Although religious liberty for Italy was still emerging, Beckwith urged Waldensian leaders toward a renewal of missionary efforts, which had been essentially dormant for centuries. The pastors, and then the people, learned Italian-and became Italian. But Italy continued to suffer from political struggles, and it wasn't until 1870 that papal political control was reduced by regulation, and longer still before it was a practical reality.

Emigration

During the last half of the 1800s, the Waldensians suffered serious economic difficulties. The cause was the increasing population, combined

with crop failures from drought and plant diseases. That led to emigration. From the 1840s, young men had found work on the French Riviera, returning to the Valleys in the off-season. Others then went to Lyons, Geneva, and other localities and, over time, they settled permanently into these areas. In most cases, they became assimilated into the local Protestant group.

Starting in 1856, small groups began emigrating to Uruguay and, later, to Argentina. Widely dispersed with few pastors, they had difficulty maintaining their identity at first. By the turn of the century, there were several thousand Waldensians in South America.

In 1875, a splinter group left Uruguay and went to New York, and from there went to Monett, Missouri. A few Waldensians had found their way to North America in the 1600s, fleeing persecution. A later group of immigrants established a Waldensian settlement in North Carolina. Smaller groups went to Texas and Illinois. In the mid-1850s, Waldensians who had joined the LDS Church emigrated from the Piedmont Valleys to Utah, and were joined in 1880s and 1890s by other Waldensians from the Valleys and from North Carolina.

Developments in the Valleys

In the meantime, Waldensians in the Valleys expanded their work, focusing on service activities. They built schools, including a junior college in Torre Pellice. Here, a group of teachers started the Société d'Histoire Vaudoise (Society of Waldensian History) and published the Bulletin de la Société d'Histoire Vaudoise. The group later changed their name to the Società di Studi Valdesi (Society for Waldensian Studies) and the name of the periodical to Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi. The Bulletin/Bollettino is a helpful resource for genealogical and historical research.

The Twentieth Century

But Waldensian troubles were not over. In 1911, new government rules caused some schools to close and the effort to build new ones was set aside. In 1915, Italy joined World War I, which was disastrous for the country, for it permitted Fascism to become established. A major war between two Protestant countries, Great Britain and Germany, significantly reduced Protestant influence in Italy.

In 1929, Mussolini and the Catholic Church signed a Concordat which repudiated the notion of a free state. The Waldensian Church was only "permitted," and all Protestants were suspect because they had contacts abroad and were known for their passion for liberty and their spirit of autonomy.

In 1979, the Waldensian and Methodist Churches in Italy became "federated," with one synod and one constitution. They exist as separate churches, but cooperate on a number of efforts.

Conclusion

The Waldensians thus represent a remarkable history. Audisio cites a statement that John of Salisbury attributed to Bernard of Chartres in the Twelfth Century. Neither of them was speaking of Waldensians, of course; but the idea well conveys our debt to, and our gratitude for, our Waldensian ancestors:

"We are dwarfs, set upon giants' shoulders."

RECOMMENDED READING

(NOTE: Titles no longer in print may be available through libraries participating in the Interlibrary Loan program.)

General Waldensian Histories

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