

# CHAPTER I

## ***ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF THE ITALIAN WALDENSAINS***

"Wild, narrow and inaccessible, rising from the plain and finally losing themselves in the rocky heights forming the French frontier," **1** the Protestant valleys on the Italian side of the Cottian Alps provide the setting for this study. The scenery of this portion of northern Italy is exceedingly grand and beautiful; though, owing to its rugged nature, the higher regions are not very productive.

We do not know when or why the first inhabitants chose these alpine valleys for their home. What we do know is that this remote region eventually produced a hardy colony who, living apart from other Christian communities, "retained their primitive appearance and manners to a greater degree than almost any other [Christian sect in Europe.]" **2**

Historically, not many more than 20,000 people have inhabited these alpine valleys at any one time. Though small in size (the valleys constitute an area of about 300 square miles, 22 miles in length and 16 miles wide,) this is a region rich in religious tradition. The Waldensians claim a heritage that some believe dates back to the dawn of Christendom. Captain R. M. Stephens explains that "the history of the Waldense is nothing if it is not viewed from a spiritual standpoint; their story is one long continual struggle for liberty of conscience." **3**

The beginnings of the Waldensians **4** as a separate religious sect is obscure and complicated by controversy. Do they go back in unbroken succession to the Apostles? Are they descendants of various groups of dissenters who fled to the wild mountains of Piedmont to escape religious persecution? Or are they specifically the heirs of Peter Waldo, a twelfth century religious reformer from Lyons, France?

English writer William St. Gilly, and early Waldensian historians, including Jean Leger and Henry Arnaud, **5** support the theory of apostolic origin as described by James D. McCabe:

Soon after the introduction of Christianity into Italy by the Apostles, the people of these valleys became converts to the faith preached by St. Paul. They accepted and taught the doctrines of the Apostles, and practiced simple rites. . . . They acknowledged the Holy Scriptures as their sole rule of faith, and rejected all that was not taught in the books of the New Testament. From the days of Constantine to the present. . . they have never changed their faith, and have never altered any important particular of their religious observance. **6**

Dr. Alexis Muston devotes thirty-four pages in his two volume work, The Israel

of the Alps, to the question of origin and concluded that "the Vaudois, therefore, are not schismatics, but continued inheritors of the Church founded by the apostles." **7** twentieth century historians, Catholic writers, and educators such as Walter F. Adeney [Professor of History of Religious Doctrine at Manchester University and Lancashire College in England] contend that there is not a shred of evidence to link the Waldensians with the apostles. **8** These writers maintain that the Waldense are simply the followers of Peter Waldo.

Will Durant, the 20th Century popular historian, dismisses the Waldensians as "heretics," "preservers of heresies and semi-communistic aspirations," and "continuing an old tradition of basing radical proposals upon Biblical texts." In ten references throughout his book, The Story of Civilization, Vol. VI, The Reformation, Durant completely anathematized them. **9**

Adeney is at least objective in acknowledging Waldensian achievements. He does not label them "heretics", allowing that

. . . this community of hardy mountaineers. . . [established a church that] was able to develop and maintain its own individuality and to withstand the attacks of opponents in a way that has almost suggested the miraculous. [But to maintain its doctrinal purity] throughout all these centuries would demand a double miracle. **10**

In order to come to terms with this controversy over origin of the Waldensians as a religious sect, it is necessary to trace Christianity in Northern Italy from the time of Constantine in the fourth century to the activities of Peter Waldo at the end of the twelfth century. In 312 A.D., Christians numbered about five percent of the total population of the Roman Empire. In many areas the Christian Church was represented only by a few scattered groups of repressed, poor, and occasionally persecuted minorities of low social status. These groups held secret services and were of little political significance to the great Roman Empire which was then at the point of collapse. Struggles among rival emperors brought frequent civil wars, while barbarian hordes threatened the borders.

However, these circumstances changed in 312 when a soldier named Constantine, who had proclaimed himself sole legitimate Emperor in the West, had a vision in which

He said that about noon he saw with his own eyes a cross of light in the heavens, about the sun, and bearing the inscription BY THIS SIGN SHALT THOU CONQUER. At this divine sign he was struck by amazement, as was the whole army, which also witnessed the miracle. **11**

Subsequently, Constantine believed that the god of the Christians had revealed

himself as the true God and had promised him victory. When he was successful in his battles, Constantine united the whole Empire under his rule and the Christian church found itself suddenly raised to prominence with power, prestige and patronage. Although Constantine was not baptized until 337 when he was on his deathbed, he took a great interest in matters of the Christian church, himself presiding at the Council of Nicea in 325 A.D. where the official doctrine of the church was defined.

Faced with dissension within the various far-flung branches of the church at that time, Constantine helped to unify, legalize and define the beliefs of the Christian church. Thus he is credited with launching Christianity on the path to power. By 361, many members of the upper classes in the Roman Empire had embraced the new faith. Subsequently, many innovations were introduced into the church to accommodate the new converts.

But there were those who staunchly resisted these secular changes. Cries of protests from Christians in the alpine valleys of Piedmont reached Rome as early as 370 A.D. In that year Vigilantius, a dissident Spanish elder who had taken up residence in that region, condemned the Roman worship of images, saints and relics. He protested prayers for the dead, and other innovations that had crept into the church. From a letter written by Jerome we learn that some bishops in the vicinity of the Cottian Alps supported Vigilantius in opposing what they perceived to be errors. **12** In this early period, the people of the Piedmont Valleys considered themselves simply Christians and not members of a church separate and apart from the universal Christian community.

Stephens points out in The Burning Bush that when Napoleon was in Turin in 1805 he contacted the Moderator (President) of the Mountain Church and asked how long it had been since the Waldensians became an independent church. "Since the time of Claude, Bishop of Turin" **13** was the answer.

Claude became Bishop of Turin in 817. Within a short period he ordered images and relics removed from the churches in his dioceses. Claude denied the mystic doctrine of the Mass and denounced the claim of the Bishop of Rome to authority over all other Christian leaders. **14**

The official history of the Waldensian Church, published in 1980, all but ignores the ancient claims to apostolic origin and the debate this theory perpetuated in the last century. Times change and in the interim certain doctrines and practices appear to have been altered. Today, the cross is often used as adornment on newer Waldensian Church buildings. Early Waldensians refused to use the cross to adorn their homes or churches, for anciently they regarded it as a symbol of apostate Christianity. "God commands us to bear our cross, not to worship it" wrote Claude in the ninth century. "They worship it, but bear it neither corporally nor spiritually." **15**

Pastors of the Waldensian Church today join modern historians in dating the beginning of the church from the time of Peter Waldo (1140?-1206 or 07), "a wealthy merchant of Lyons, who became convinced in 1173 that every man had a right to read and interpret the Scriptures for himself. [Waldo] engaged two priests to translate portions of the Bible into the language of the people." **16** He then followed Christ's admonition to the rich young ruler to go and sell all his goods and distribute the proceeds among the poor. He made some provisions for the support of his family and then went forth to preach as he felt the Lord wanted him to do. He attracted followers and founded a movement. Upon observing Waldo and his followers--the Poor Men of Lyons-- Catholic official Walter Map recorded:

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. **17**

In time, the local archbishop became aware of Waldo's work and forbade him and his followers to preach, as they were not ordained priests. Waldo and his Poor Men took their case to the Pope in 1179. They were received kindly but were not given permission to preach in "their vulgar tongue (or) spread the Gospel." **18** In 1184, Waldo and his followers were excommunicated from the Catholic church and, scattering in all directions, went off two by two to preach the Gospel throughout Europe.

Although some historians believe that Peter Waldo founded the Waldensian church, many others writing in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries claim otherwise. **19** All modern writers and the Waldensian Church today accept Waldo as the founder, allowing for some groundwork by earlier reformers. **20** Adeney believes that the Waldensian church was a fusion of twelfth century reform movements. He believes that the followers of Waldo united with those of Arnold of Brescia (1100?-1155), Peter of Bruys (1104-1125) and Henry of Cluny, (who died in 1150):

The ideas were in the air, the spirit was alive and awake, when Waldo and his "Poor Men" came with apostolic fervor to embrace them and blend them with their own version of the teaching of Jesus. There were Arnoldists, Petrobrusians, and Henricians before Waldo, existing as scattered religionists. But it was his movement that gathered in the harvest of their lives and brought about the formation of a Waldensian Church. **21**

None of the theories of origin can be verified. However, the question looms larger when one realizes that at its base is the issue of authority. If the Waldensian church was simply an outgrowth of reform movements of the day, then it was no different from any other Protestant church. If, on the other hand, the Waldensian

valleys were a last stronghold of ancient Christendom, then the Roman church was the apostate church. This may have been at the crux of the bitter argument between Rome and the early mountain Christians. The authority issue was of major significance to the Waldensians who converted to the Mormon church.

Be that as it may, by the end of the twelfth century the Waldensians of the Protestant valleys were united by a faith grounded in the teachings of Jesus Christ. Collectively, they had rejected papal authority, claiming the Catholic church was in a state of apostasy. Finally, they had organized a vibrant church that would sustain them during seven hundred years of severe persecution.

Early in the thirteenth century, Pope Innocent III, confronted by heresy in many quarters, began a crusade against all heretics. His efforts were continued and intensified by his successors. The alpine valleys became scenes of unsurpassed cruelty with extensive murders and burning. **22** As a result many Waldensians left and became scattered throughout Europe where they joined other dissidents in Spain, Germany, France, Austria and Bohemia. Reinerius Sacho, an inquisitor sent to the valleys to force submission to Catholic doctrine, noted in 1245:

Among all these sects which still are, or have been, there is not one more pernicious to the church than that of the Leonists, and this on three accounts: The first is, because it is of longer duration. For some say that it has existed from the time of Sylvester; others from the time of the Apostles. The second, because it is more general, for there is almost no land in which this sect is not. The third, because [although] all other sects, through their monstrous blasphemy against God, strike horror into their hearers, this of the Leonists has a great appearance of piety, inasmuch as they live justly before men, and believe not only in the articles of the creed, but every sound doctrine respecting the Deity; only they speak evil of the Roman church and clergy, to which the multitude of the laity are quite willing to give credence." **23**

The Waldensians took the Bible as the standard of their faith and the Apostles' Creed as the summary of their doctrine. Anciently, they were uneducated. While most could not read, they were able to memorize and often committed entire books to memory. In the middle ages, when only the priests were allowed access to the scriptures, the Catholic church claimed common use of the Bible was the mainspring of heresy. "I have heard and seen a certain unlettered countryman who used to recite Job word for word, and many others who knew the whole New Testament perfectly," wrote an inquisitor in 1260. **24** Later, when printed copies became available, Bible reading became a common daily practice in Waldensian families. "The only book my father owned was a Bible," recalled Marie Madeleine Cardon. "It was then over two centuries old, handed down from his ancestors." **25**

Throughout the fourteenth century, persecution continued not only in the alpine

valleys but in most other areas where the Vaudois had taken refuge. General persecution and harassment against all heretics became so widespread in the fifteenth century that many sects were completely wiped out. However, a remnant of the Italian Waldense persisted because generally their mountains protected them until danger had passed and they could return to their homes. **26** For this reason, the valleys on the Italian side of the Alps now became the center and chief home of the Waldensians, as those Waldense who had fled to the French side of the Alps and to other locations were completely annihilated.

Just before the Reformation began to spread throughout Europe with the dawn of the sixteenth century, the only organized opponents of the Catholic Church were the Waldense of the Protestant valleys and some Hussites or Bohemians whom the Roman clergy also identified as Waldensians. Though the Bohemian Brethren were the first to contact Martin Luther, the Italian Waldensians soon joined them with messages of congratulations. Representatives of both groups were sent to Luther in Germany and Calvin in Switzerland. The outcome of these exchanges was a conference in Angrogna held in 1532 during which the Waldensians decided to make some changes in their practices. They adopted public worship, having previously met secretly in dens and caves; they publicly condemned those who called themselves "Vaudois" but had been attending Catholic services. The Waldensians united with Reformers on several doctrines, including their views on predestination, oaths, marriage of the clergy and some sacraments. The movement that had seeded the Reformation now merged with it. **27**

The marriage was sealed with a gift. The Waldensians commissioned Robert Olivetan, cousin of John Calvin, to translate the Bible into the French language. "It was evident that the Waldensians were thus ready to seek a wider audience for their witness than was possible with their old Bible in Provencal and to take advantage of the most recent textual studies," wrote Tourn in The Waldensians. Calvin himself penned the Preface to the "Olivetan Bible" which was printed in Neuchatel and delivered to the Waldensians in 1535. This remarkable translation was the first of the French Reformation and has been widely used as the basis for later French revisions. **28**

The open participation of the Waldense in the Reformation and their cooperation with Swiss and German protestant movements left no ambiguity as to their relationship with the Roman church. Consequently, the period between 1540 and 1690 became a time of great persecution. Yet the Waldensians often took the offensive:

Those sturdy mountaineers were not meek martyrs led as lambs to the slaughter. They carried the war into the enemy's camp. . . The Waldenses became in a literal sense a Church militant, taking to the field in arms and fighting valiantly for their liberty of worship, with hardy heroism and at times with brilliant success. **29**

In January of 1561, the Vaudois found themselves trapped by the Pope's troops. They were ordered to attend mass within 24 hours or suffer death. They gathered together and took an oath to "Maintain the Bible, whole and without admixture, preserving in this holy religion. . . at the peril of our lives, in order that we may transmit it to our children, intact and pure, as we received it from our fathers." **30**

The next day the Waldense pretended to comply with the Count of Trinity's order and attended their churches which had been taken over by the Catholics. At a given signal they ripped down the crucifix, candles and images that the priests had brought for the celebration of the mass. They then rushed from their churches and attacked those who had come to enforce the decree.

As soon as he could reorganize, the Count led his army into the Valley of Angrogna against a well-organized and carefully prepared Vaudois army. Though greatly outnumbered, the Vaudois knew the terrain, had experience in guerilla warfare, and fought with the sure knowledge that defeat would bring death to themselves and their families. The Count's troops sustained one defeat after another. Each time they charged they were hurled back:

Even the Spanish infantry, the flower of the whole force, was routed with terrible loss. The Count burst into tears as he beheld the suffering of his troops, while the men [murmured and refused to fight] exclaiming, "God fights for them and we do them wrong." **31**

Finally the Catholic army retreated after suffering a serious humiliation. But Michele Ghislier, the grand inquisitor (later Pope Pius V), succeeded where the Count's troops had failed. The heretics were brought before him and eliminated one by one. **32**

A period of relative calm followed the darkest days of the inquisition. For over half a century the Vaudois were left in peace. However, in 1630 a French army passed through the valleys and brought with it the bubonic plague, then raging in Europe. Hundreds died including all but three of the Vaudois pastors. New pastors came from Switzerland but those who came spoke only French. Henceforth, all Vaudois services were conducted in French instead of the French-Italian mixture (Patua) that was the common language of the people.

The seventeenth century was a time of terrible persecutions. Several times it appeared that this ancient community would be completely exterminated. The Easter massacre of 1655 was so savage that all of Protestant Europe was aroused. **33** Oliver Cromwell proclaimed a fast and commissioned John Milton to draw up a letter to Louis XIV condemning the act and threatening reprisal. Milton wrote a sonnet about the 1,712 Waldense who were slaughtered and entitled it "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont":

Avenge, O Lord thy slaughtered saints, whose bones  
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold;  
E'en them who kept Thy Truth so pure of old,  
When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,  
Forget not: In Thy book, record their groans  
Who are Thy sheep, and in their ancient fold  
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that roll'd  
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
to heaven . . . **34**

The worst was yet to come. In 1685, Louis XIV revoked the Edict of Nantes, which granted religious freedom to all French subjects. The following year a French and Piedmontese army invaded the valleys. The Waldense fought bravely crying "Death rather than the Mass," but out of a population of 14,000, 2,000 were slain. The 8,500 survivors were imprisoned where cold and disease accomplished what the Catholic armies had left undone. "The rest survived thanks only to abjuration of their faith which was more formal than substantial." **35** Six months after their imprisonment the survivors, a half-starved remnant of 3,000, were allowed to go into exile in Switzerland.

They remained there for three years, until 1689, when their pastor-soldier, Henry Arnaud, led a ten-day march back to their valleys which became known in the annals of Waldense history as "The Glorious Return." But the price of reclaiming their alpine valleys was high. Of the 1,000 fighting men who returned to their homeland fewer than 400 survived. **36**

After the French Revolution when Piedmont again came under control of France, the Waldensians appealed to Napoleon. The result was a proclamation allowing liberty of conscience to all French subjects. However, after Napoleon's fall, Victor Emanuel I took possession of Piedmont and the Waldense were again placed under severe restrictions. They could not leave their valleys to live in the more productive plains. Their colleges were closed and they were prevented from entering universities. They were barred from some professions and could not hold commissions in the army.

However, by the mid-1800s the current of European opinion so strongly favored religious liberty that King Charles Albert of Savoy abandoned his predecessor's policies. On February 18, 1848, he issued the Edict of Emancipation granting the Vaudois full civil and religious rights including access to public schools and universities and the right to move from the confines of their valleys. The King's proclamation brought an end to the centuries of religious persecution and placed the Vaudois on an equal footing with Savoy's other citizens. Three days of celebration followed the announcement and the entire country rejoiced. Marie Madeleine Cardon explained: "The King said that no other people on earth could have suffered what we did and still

be true to their religion and loyal to the laws of the land." **37**

A hymn composed by Vaudois poetess Felicia Hermans was later translated into English and revised for use in Mormon services. It describes poetically how the Waldense perceive themselves and their long colorful history:

For the strength of the hills we bless Thee,  
Our God, our father's God.  
Thou has made Thy children mighty  
By the touch of the mountain sod.  
Thou has fixed our ark of refuge  
Where the spoiler's foot ne'er trod. . .  
For the strength of the hills we bless Thee,  
Our God, our father's God.

We are watchers of a beacon,  
Whose light must never die;  
We are guardians of an altar  
"Midst the silence of the sky."  
The rocks yield founts of courage,  
Struck forth as by Thy Rod.  
For the strength of the hills we bless Thee,  
Our God, our father's God. . . .

For the shadow of Thy presence  
'Round our camp of rock outspread;  
For the stern defiles of battle,  
Bearing record of our dead:  
For the snows and for the torrents,  
For the free heart's burial sod:  
For the strength of the hills we bless Thee,  
Our God, our Father's God. . . .**38**

It was this dramatic history which so impressed Lorenzo Snow that he established a mission among the Waldensians. From the writings of the early converts it appears that many Waldensians were spiritually prepared for the missionaries' message of restoration, for by 1850, many questioned whether the Waldensian Church was the true church. Upon his deathbed John Combe (1775-1847) instructed his granddaughter, Mary Catherine Gaydou, "Take heed to my words Mary, remember what I say, that the old may not, but the young and rising generation will see the day when the gospel shall be restored in its purity and power and in that day, Mary, remember me." Stephen Malan wrote of the time prior to the appearance of the Mormon Elders in the valleys of Piedmont, "Some received visions, some dreams,

some by sudden inspiration of the spirit awakened to a sense that the religious principles of the day were not in accordance with Holy Writ." John Daniel Malan and Barthelemy Pons both expressed dissatisfaction with the teachings of the mountain church years before the coming of the Mormon elders. **39**

In summary, it appears that the Waldensians had faith or "light" enough to sustain them through seven hundred years of intense persecution. **40** Whether this "light" came directly from Christ's apostles, or was distilled through Peter Waldo and his Poor Men, or came to them as a result of regular scripture reading, it is difficult to judge. Their piety and submission to civil authority while defending their right to liberty of conscience is evidence of strong character. The fact that they persisted for so many centuries despite every attempt to "extinguish" them denotes determination and commitment. Their history testifies that they were a unique people in the annals of religious history.

## NOTES

1. Captain R.M. Stephens, The Burning Bush (Northants, Great Britain: Stanley L. Hunt Ltd., 1950), p. 10. (Hereafter cited as Burning Bush.)
2. McCabe, James D., Cross and Crown (London: Jones Brothers Co., 1873), p. 22. (Hereafter cited as Cross and Crown.)
3. Stephens, Burning Bush, p. 14.
4. Note that English writers use the names Waldensian, Waldenses, and Waldense interchangeably. The name translates to "Vaudois" in French and "Valdesi" in Italian, both stemming from the Latin *Vallis densa* (a thick or shady valley or the inhabitants of such places). The earliest inhabitants of the Piedmont valleys considered themselves simply "Christians" and not a separate religious sect. They called themselves "Valley men" or "Valley dwellers," thereby identifying the region from which they came. By 1631, however, the name "Waldensian" had become synonymous with heretic or sorcerer. Joan of Arc was charged with being a *vaudoise* or sorceress. Catholic writers claim the sect took its name from its founder, Peter Waldo. However, this argument is debatable. In The Burning Bush Stephens writes, "It has sometimes been said that the Waldenses derive their name from Peter Waldo, but in all official documents of the period the followers of Peter are never referred to as Vaudois or Valdenses but always as Poor Men of Lyons." (p. 11). An even stronger argument against this hypothesis is that the name "Waldenses" (Vallenses) was first used in official Catholic documents in 1179 by Raymond of Daventry, in his sentence of condemnation against two barbes (clergymen) from the Piedmont valleys. This document was written five years before Waldo and his followers were excommunicated from the Catholic church. See Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics ed. 1908-1926 s.v., p. 666. In 1179, Waldo was still in full fellowship within the Catholic Church. In that year, he and some of his followers were received by Pope Alexander III at the third Lateran Council in Rome. See Comba, Emilio, History of the Waldenses in Italy (London: Truslove & Shirley, 1889) pp. 31-36. Bray indicates in History of the Old Waldensians (London: Joseph Downing, 1712) that "some of Waldo's disciples did probably join themselves with the Churches of the Vallies [sic] of Piedmont . . ." But that Waldo himself retired into Flanders and Picardy. (See Book I, p. 3.)
5. William St. Gilly, Waldensian researches during a second visit to the Vaudois of Piedmont (London, C. & J. Rivington, 1831) p. 8-9. Leger, Jean, Historie Generale Des Eglises Evangeliques de Piemont ou Vaudoise (Aleycle: Jean Le Carpentier, 1669), Dedication, pp. 2a-2b. Henry Arnaud, The Glorious Recovery by the Vaudois of Their Valleys (London: John Murray,

Albemarle-Street, 1898). pp. xxi-xxii. (Hereafter cited as Glorious Recovery.)

6. McCabe, Cross and Crown, p. 22-23.

7. Dr. Alexis Muston, The Israel of the Alps (London: Blackie & Son, 1875), pp. 506-540; also p. 13.

8. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, n.d. ed., s.v. "Waldenses," by Walter F. Adeney (hereafter cited as Adeney.)

9. "A heretical teaching was one which conflicted with that laid down by the Church, and a heretic was someone who not only fell into error, but on being shown his heresy persisted in it." R. I. Moore, The Birth of Popular Heresy (London: Edward Arnold Ltd., 1975), p. 3. Will Durant, The Story of Civilization Vol VI, The Reformation (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1957), pp. 153, 169, 382. (It is interesting to note that Will Durant was educated in Catholic parochial schools. See p. 1027.)

10. Adeney, p. 664.

11. Robert Browning, "In This Sign Shalt Thou Conquer," The Fires of Faith New York: Newsweek Books, 1973), p. 15. See also Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, n.d. ed., s.v. "Constantine the Great," by H. B. Workman.

Note that, of necessity, many of the quotes in this chapter came from secondary sources. As I do not speak neither French nor Italian, nor read Latin, it was impossible for me to consult primary sources dealing with the early Christian era. My objective here is simply to sketch the events of early Christendom so that the reader might develop an appreciation for the antiquity of the Waldensian community. Additionally, as most of the Vaudois converts to the Mormon Church trace their pedigrees back to the seventeenth century and beyond, this chapter provides a foundation for understanding their unique religious and ethnic heritage.

12. Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics, n.d. ed., "Jerome" by G. Grutzmacher.

13. Captain R. M. Stephens, Never Failing Light, (Torre Pellice: Claudina, 1957), p. 26.

14. Ibid, pp. 26-27.

15. Giorgio Tourn, The Waldensians, the first 800 years, ed. Charles W. Arbuthnot, trans. Camillo P. Merlino, Turin: Claudiana, 1980, p. 183, describes the apostolic origin theory as legend. Earlier pastors perpetuated the theory, modern Waldensian pastors disclaim it. But then, other changes have come to

the Waldensian Church in the past century. Waldensian temples constructed in the twentieth century, e.g. at St. Second, Pinerolo and at Prali are decorated with crosses. The author was told when she was in Torre Pellice that Mussolini required that the cross be displayed on all churches and schools. This may account for their use in modern construction. However, none of the older buildings bear crosses. Waldensian schools side-stepped Mussolini's requirement by displaying a picture of Jesus with the little children rather than a cross. Henry Arnaud, the seventeenth century pastor-soldier-historian, recorded that the cross was a symbol of apostate Christianity. See the prefatory Compendium of Glorious Recovery, pp. xxvii-xxix.)

16. Watts, Waldenses in New World, p. 4.

17. Tourn, The Waldensians, p. 13.

18. Watts, Waldenses in New World, p. 4.

19. Historians who believed in Apostolic origin included Dr. Alexis Muston, a French pastor; Jean Leger, Waldensian pastor-historian; Henry Arnaud, Waldensian pastor-historian and soldier; James D. McCabe, American historian; and William St. Gilly, an Anglican priest, to name some of the more prominent. (Historical publications cited in foregoing notes.)

20. Historians who claim Waldo was the founder of the Waldensian church include Peter Toon who published in The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church, 1974, s.v. "Waldense"; also Will Durant, popular historian; and Giorgio Tourn, pastor and intellectual leader of the Waldensian Church today. See his letter to the author on p. 25.

21. Adeney, p. 666.

22. Ibid., p. 667.

23. William Strong, A Brief Sketch of the Waldenses (Lawrence, Kansas: University Press, 1893). p. 47.

24. Stephens, Burning Bush, p. 12.

25. Marie Madeleine Cardon Guild, "Autobiography," Typescript in possession of author, p. 2. (Hereafter cited as Guild, Autobiography.)

26. The first serious village massacre in the alpine valleys occurred on Christmas Eve, 1386, when armed troops of Inquisitor Borelli descended on the Valley of Pragelato: "The inhabitants, forewarned, fled to the mountain at the foot of which their villages [were] sheltered. . . High up on the icy slopes of the

mountain fifty little children died [from exposure] with their mothers beside them; no less than 150 people perished that night, whilst the villages were delivered to flames." Stephens, Burning Bush p. 19.

27. The Waldensians claim to be the oldest Protestant church in the world. They believe that their doctrine, emphasizing Bible teachings and the apostasy of the Catholic church, established a foundation for later reform movements. In The Waldensians (p. 76) Tourn indicates that the Reformation, in fact, absorbed the Waldensian church: "The Waldensians had to choose to become a part of the reformation or to be dissolved." Also, from page 74: "The most radical elements. . . insisted that the whole thrust and organization of the old Waldensian movement should be fully integrated into the Reformation effort." As a result of this decision, the Waldensians adopted their "Confessions of Faith," a statement of beliefs that aligned them with the Protestant movement at the Synod of Chanforan in 1532 (p. 73.)

28. The preface reads in part, that the Waldenses "give thanks to God that having received the Bible from the Apostles or their immediate successors, they have always preserved to themselves the enjoyment of the blessings." Stephens, Burning Bush p. 13. Strong quotes the preface in A Brief Sketch of the Waldenses, (Lawrence: University Press, 1893) p. 37-38: "It is to thee alone I present this precious treasure, in the name of a certain poor people, thy friends, and brethren of Jesus Christ, who ever since they were blessed and enriched with it by the apostles and ambassadors of Christ, have still possessed and enjoyed the same." Note difference in translations.

29. Adeney, p. 669.

30. Captain R.M. Stephens, Never Failing Light, (Torre Pellice, Italy: Libreria Editrice Claudiana, 1957), p. 95.

31. McCabe, Cross and Crown, p. 54.

32. Ibid., p. 39-40. McCabe lists the methods by which the heretics were eliminated: "Jordan Tertian was burned alive at Suza;. . . Ugon Chiamps, of Fenestrelle, was taken at Suza, and conducted to Turin, where his bowels were torn out, and flung into a basin, without his suffering being terminated even by this frightful torture. Peter Geymonat, of Bobi, died at Lucerna, with a living cat in the interior of his body; Mary Romaine was buried alive at Roche Plate; Madeleine Fontane suffered the same fate at St. John; Michel Gonet, a man almost a hundred years of age, was burned alive at Sarcena: Susanna Micheline, at the same place, was left in a dying state upon the snow. Bartholomew Franche, having been hacked with sabres, had his wounds filled with quicklime, and expired in this manner at Fenil. Daniel Michelin had his tongue torn out at Bobi, for having praised God. James Baridon died,

covered with brimstone matches, which they had fastened between his fingers, and about his lips, his nostrils, and all parts of his body. Daniel Revel had his mouth filled with gunpowder, which was set on fire, and the explosion of which tore his head in pieces. Mary Mounin was taken in the Combe of Liouza, the flesh of her cheeks and of her chin was removed, so that the jaws were exposed, and in this way she was left to die. Paul Garnier was slowly mangled at Rora; Thomas Marguet mutilated in an indescribable manner at the Fort of Mirabouc, and Susanna Jaquin cut in pieces at La Tour. A number of young women of Taillaret, in order to escape outrages still more dreadful to them than death, flung themselves from a precipice, and perished among the rocks. Sarah Rostagnol was cleft up through the middle of her body, and was left in a dying state on the road from Eyrals to Lucerna. Anne Charbonnier was impaled alive, and borne in this state like a banner from St. Jean to La Tour. At Paesane, Daniel Rambaud had his nails torn out, then his fingers cut off, then his feet and hands were severed by blows of hatchets, and then his arms and legs were separated from his body upon each refusal that he made to abjure the Gospel. There is not a rock in the Vaudois Valleys which [can] not be looked on as a monument of death, nor a meadow but has been the scene of some execution, not a village but has had its martyrs. No history however complete, can contain a record of them all."

33. At 4:00 a.m. on the Saturday before Easter Sunday, April 24, 1655, a signal from a cannon alerted the troops. They arose and began the systematic slaughter of entire villages. No age was spared. The Waldensian pastor-historian, Jean Leger, gave a detailed account of this day. From McCabe, pp. 71-73:

"Little children were torn from the arms of their mothers, dashed against the rocks, and cast carelessly away. The sick or the aged, both men and women, were either burned in their houses, or hacked in pieces; or mutilated, half-murdered and flayed alive, they were exposed in a dying state to the heat of the sun, or to the flames, or to ferocious beasts; others were tied, in a state of nakedness, into the form of balls, the head between the legs, and in this state were rolled down the precipices. Some of them, torn and bruised by the rocks from which they had rebounded, remained suspended from some projecting rock or the branch of some tree, and still groaned forty-eight hours afterward. Women and young girls were violated, impaled, set up naked upon pikes at the corners of roads, buried alive, roasted upon lances, and cut in pieces by the soldiers of the faith, as by cannibals; then, after the massacre, the children which had survived it, and were found wandering in the woods, were carried away; or the children were forcibly taken from what remained of their afflicted family, to be conveyed into the dwellings of these butchers, and into monasteries, like lambs taken to the slaughter house; and finally, conflagration--the monks, the propagandists, and the

zealous Catholics running from house to house with resinous torches, or incendiary projectiles, and ravaging in the midst of the fires, these village now filled with corpses."

Leger feared that his account might be suspect and so concluded his narrative with these words: "Let it not be said that I exaggerate things upon account of the persecutions which I myself personally have endured; I have traveled from one village to another to collect the authentic testimonies of the survivors, who deposed what things they had seen before two notaries who accompanied me. In some places fathers had seen their children torn through the midst by the strength of men's arms, or cut through with swords; in other laces mothers had seen their daughters forced or murdered in their presence. Daughters had witnessed the mutilation of the living bodies of their fathers; brothers had seen the mouths of their brothers filled with powder, to which the persecutors set fire, making the head fly in pieces; pregnant women had been ripped up, and the fruit of their womb had been seen taken living from their bowels. What shall I say? O my God! . . . These are the things which I can tell."

34. Stephens, Never Failing Light, p. 144.

35. Tourn, The Waldensians, p. 136.

36. Arnaud, Glorious Recovery, p. 202.

37. Guild, "Autobiography," p. 2. Guild writes about being loyal to the laws of the land. In "Children of the Valleys" Marriner and Stephan Cardon indicate that

"The present boundaries of France and Italy follow the highest crests of the Cottian Alps, but in times [past] sovereignty over these valleys shifted many times--from Roman and Holy Roman Emperors to Italian Princes to French Kings to Italian Dukes to French Emperor and then to Sardinian King" (p. 1). The Waldensians were members of a closed community who married endogamously. As the Waldensian converts to the Mormon Church bore French names, it is probable that most were of French rather than Italian or Swiss extraction.

38. Snow, Lorenzo Snow, pp. 170-171.

39. Madeleine Malan Farley, "Autobiographical Sketch and Family Record," LDS Genealogical Library, Salt Lake City, Utah. (Hereafter cited as Autobiography). Stephen Malan, "Autobiography and Family Record" (1893), MS. Archives of the Historical Department of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (hereafter Church Archives: Account cited hereafter as Autobiography.) Also accounts of dissatisfaction were cited by children of Malan and Pons. (See Stephen Malan Autobiography and Lydia Pons Farley, "Historical Sketch," LDS Genealogical Library, "Genealogical Surveys, LDS Members," (1911)

Autobiographies and ancestors collected by Genealogical Society of Utah, March, 1955, Vol. 24. (Hereafter cited as Historical Sketch.)

#### 40. **EMBLEM AND MOTTO OF THE WALDENSIAN CHURCH**

The idea of the emblem is drawn from the book of Revelation (chap. 1), while the motto "The light shines in the darkness" is drawn from the Gospel of John (1:5). It appears that the origin of this emblem is connected to the seal of the Count Manfredi of Luserna, a lamp (representing Luserna) with seven stars." (From Cartoline Storiche Valdesi, 2a serie, Torre Pellice, Italy.) This emblem now decorates many of the churches in the Piedmont valleys.



***LETTER TO DIANE STOKOE FROM GIORGIO TOURN***

October 4, 1985

Dear Madam:

I thank you very much for your amiable letter, and regret not having answered your question exactly.

The subject of the apostolic descent of the Vaudois movement is very ancient and goes back to the Middle Ages, where the preachers of that era affirmed by demonstrating that they were not heretics, but that their message was derived from that of the Apostles.

More recent and profound studies indicate that the movement itself came from or originated with Waldo of Lyon. It is not possible therefore, to affirm or state positively, that the Vaudois authority descended directly from the Apostles, but it remains evident that their preaching was supported directly by the Bible, and could be considered as an extension of the preachings or teachings of the Apostles.

I hope that I have answered your question, and I am happy to think that you have felt again a link with your Vaudois origins.

Please accept, dear Madam, my sincere best wishes.

President

/s/ G. Tourn

Pasteur Giorgio Tourn

(Translated from French by Melda F. Hacking. Reviewed by Dr. John A. Green.)

4 Modern Waldensians. 4.1 In Italy 4.2 In the United States of America 4.3 In South America 4.4 In Germany. 5 External links. Origin: Peter Waldo and his followers. Waldo began to preach on the streets of Lyon in 1173. History, Doctrine, and Rites of the Ancient Albigenses and Waldenses, (London, 1832). Reinerius' lists of their tenets reveals that the heirs of Waldo considered themselves the true representatives of the apostolic Christian church, that statues and decorations were superfluous, that their obedience was to God, not to prelates, of whom the pope was the chief source of errors, and that no one is greater than another in the church, following Matthew 23: "All of you. are brethren." Since then the Waldensian church developed and spread through the Italian Peninsula. The Waldensians suffered violent repression after coming out into the open ; in this they shared the same fate as the French Protestants. At first, the victims were the pastors, owners of bookshops and leaders of the movement. Waldensian resistance in the Piedmont Valleys. In the Cottian Alps the Waldensians lived both in the Dauphine and in the Duchy of Savoy, on either side of the mountain. Although the valleys on the Italian side of the Alps belonged to the Duchy of Savoy, they were in constant fear of invasion by France. After the first French occupation lasting from 1536 to 1559, Duke Emmanuel Philibert, who had regained his land with the treaty of Cateau-Cambrésis (1559), sent a military expedition in 1560 against the Waldensians in the Luserne valley. The Waldensians are adherents of a proto-Protestant church tradition that began as an ascetic movement within Western Christianity before the Reformation. Originally known as the "Poor Men of Lyon" in the late twelfth century, the movement spread to the Cottian Alps in what are today France and Italy. The founding of the Waldensians is attributed to Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant who gave away his property around 1173, preaching apostolic poverty as the way to perfection. Waldensian teachings came A walk through waldensian history: c 58 - 59 A.D. Apostles of Christ plant seeds of Christianity in the Waldensian Valleys as they travel across the Cottian Alps into Gaul (France) and other parts of Europe. 839 A.D. Waldensians escape persecutions in France by fleeing to the Valleys of the Piedmont, and find there like-minded brethren, with whom they enjoy a mutual edification of faith. 1173. Italian and French armies, under command of the treacherous Marquis of Pianezza, unleash a massacre of such brutality and barbarism that all of Protestant Europe rises up in protest against the Duke of Savoy and King Louis XIV of France. Aug. 6, 1663. All Waldensians are declared rebels and condemned to death, but they mount a stalwart defense.