

Chapter 9 The Men of the Valleys

Whether they be called *Vaudois* in French, Vallenses in Latin, *Valdesi* or *Vallesi* in Italian, or Waldenses in English, their name means "men of the valleys." In German "Vald" means "forest." It is coincidental that one of their famous leader's name was Peter Waldo. The Italian valleys are Luzern, Perouse, and St. Martin.

Antiquity and Origins of the Vaudois

Concerning the antiquity and origin of the *Vaudois*, Alexis Muston in his monumental work *History of the Waldenses* wrote:

The Vaudois of the Alps are, in my opinion, primitive Christians, or descendants and representatives of the primitive church, preserved in these valleys from the corruptions successively introduced by the Church of Rome into the religion of the gospel. It is not they who have separated from Catholicism, but Catholicism which has separated from them by changing the primitive religion (Muston, *History of the Waldenses*, Vol. I, 1875:17).

Peter Allix in his *Some Remarks upon the Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Church of Piedmont* wrote:

The Vaudois had stiffly opposed the abuses of the Roman Church, and they held their doctrine from father to son, ever since the year A.D. 120, as they had heard and received it from their elders and ancestors. These Vaudois believers of the valleys could "NOT" be so called from Peter Waldo of Lyons, France because he did "NOT" flourish at the soonest till the year 1170, according to Roger Hovenden, whereas the people of the valleys of Lucerne and Angrogne had the name of Waldenses from the beginning of the 12th century. I have already made it appear, that they separated themselves from the Church in Rome long before, and that the name Vaudois, was given to them from the place of their abode, which the habitants called les Vaux de Lucerne et Angrogne, that is to say, the Valley of Lucerne Angrogne, from which came the Latin name Vallenses, which was afterwards changed to Valdenses, when the design was laid to make men believe Peter (Waldo) Valdo was their founder.

It has often been said that a man Peter Waldo, who lived in Lyons, France about the year 1170, was really the founder of this "sect that was everywhere spoken against." But, history proves that such could "NOT" be the case, as tradition of the Vaudois existence from the days of the apostles. They abounded at this time in Piedmont, and in Dauphine; all over the Southern of France, at Naples in

Sicily, and Southern Italy---in the Netherlands, Flanders, and Brabant --- in Northern France and in England. (Allix 1821:176-182.)

Our contention is that about 381 the remnant of the Church of God in the Latin west migrated from the cities into the mountains of southern France and northern Italy to maintain their religious freedom and avoid persecution from enforcement of the intolerant decree of Roman Emperor Theodosius I (Roman Emperor from 379 to 395 imposing the tenets of the First Council of Constantinople in 381. Implementation of the decree by the Roman government prompting God's people to move out of the cities into the countryside and small villages and eventually out of Roman territory altogether. These people continued to maintain communication with Christians in the east through trade routes north of the Roman frontier.

The noted Waldensian authority, William S. Gilly, states that about 840 Claude, Bishop of Turin (the Catholic bishop of Turin from 817 until his death in 827), said the "sect" of the *Vaudois* that:

Long before the Roman Church stretched forth its arms to stifle in its Antean embrace the independent flocks of the Great Shepherd, the ancestors of the Waldensians were worshiping God in the hill countries of Piedmont, as their posterity now worship him. For many ages they continued almost unnoticed. (Gilly, 1827, p. 6)

Gilly further notes:

“The Waldenses of Piedmont are not to be regarded as the successors of certain reformers, who first started up in France and Italy at a time, when the corruptions of the Roman Church and priesthood became intolerable, but as a race of simple mountaineers, who from generation to generation have continued steadily in the faith preached to their forefathers, when the territory, of which their valleys form a part, was first Christianized. Ample proof will be given of this, as I proceed, and without attempting to fix the exact period of their conversion, I trust to be able to establish the fact, that this Alpine tribe embraced the gospel as it was first announced in all its purity, and continued true to it, in the midst of almost general apostasy. Nothing is more to be regretted than the mistakes which have been made upon this point, even by Protestant authors. (Gilly, 1827, pp. 8-9).

Later in 1096, Pope Urban II described these Piedmont valleys of southeastern France as being “infested with heresy.” Gilly records the same essential fact in these words:

The terms, Vaudois in French, Vallenses in Latin, Valdesi, or Vallesi in Italian, and Waldenses in English ecclesiastical history, signify nothing more or less than 'Men of the Valleys;' and as the valleys of Piedmont have had the honor of producing a race of people, who have remained true to the faith introduced by the first missionaries, who preached Christianity in those regions, the synonyms Vaudois, Valdesi, and Waldenses, have been adopted as the distinguishing names of a religious community, faithful to the primitive creed, and free from the corruption of the Church of Rome. (Gilly, 1827, p. 6).

the Waldenses preceded Waldo by Four Centuries

It should be clear that the Waldenses preceded Peter Waldo by over four centuries. However, Roman Catholic, Lutheran, Baptist and other orthodox sources set forth scenarios arguing had their origin was with Waldo and the Poor Men of Lyons and further that Waldo was wholly enmeshed in Catholicism. That is not and has not been the view of the Church of God. In Edward McGoldrick's *Baptist Successionism: A Crucial Question in Baptist History* his faulty reasoning, his failed attempt to falsify apostolic succession, and his effort to justify and uphold the trinity heresy and advance modern Baptist Protestant theology defines his interpretation of the Waldensians (McGoldrick, 1994).

At the beginning of the twelfth century, there was a revitalization of the effort to recapture the apostles' doctrine due to the efforts of Peter de Bruys in southeastern France. It was from one of these valleys, the Valley Lucerne, that Bruys arose in 1104 and began to preach repentance. His followers were known as Petrobrusians.

The Roman Catholic Church referred to him as a heresiarch (the founder of a heresy or the leader of a heretical sect) because he disapproved of infant baptism (paedobaptism or pedobaptism from the Greek *pais* meaning "child"), opposed the veneration of crosses, rejected the doctrine of transubstantiation, and denied the efficacy of prayers for the dead. The Petrobrusians are said to hold that, 'It is unnecessary to build temples, since the Church of God does not consist in a multitude of stones joined together, but in the unity of the believers assembled (Peter of Cluny. *Patrologia Latina* vol. 189: Tractatus Contra Petrobrussianos. Jacques–Paul Migne. pp. 720–850.). Peter de Bruys gained many followers among the Cathari, initially, and later among the general public.

The Cathari (meaning “pure”), among whom de Bruys originally preached, were remnants of earlier Bogomil settlements. However, by this time, most had accepted a variety of new and strange doctrines and quite divided among themselves. His preaching, and that of his successors, brought about a revitalized Church during the first half of the twelfth century in the valleys of southeastern France. De Bruys sought to restore Christianity to its original purity. An angry Roman Catholic mob, angered by Peter's destruction of crosses, brutally murdered him in or around the year 1131 by casting him into a fire he created to burn crosses.

In rapid succession after him, there arose two other strong ministers, Arnold and Henri. After the death of Henri in 1149, the Church seemed to flounder and go into eclipse.

About 1175 Peter Waldo, a wealthy Roman Catholic from Lyons, began to profess *Vaudois* doctrine. Peter Waldo joined them upon his conversion as the result of their preaching. As confusing as it may seem, the Waldensians did not obtain their name from Peter Waldo but rather the reverse.

William Jones explains that Peter Waldo "was called Valdus, or Waldo, because he received his religious notions from the inhabitants of the valleys" (Jones. *History of the Christian Church*, Vol. 2, p. 2). Henri Arnaud, a Waldensian pastor, says of their origin:

The Vaudois are, in fact, descended from those refugees from Italy who, after St. Paul had there preached the gospel, abandoned their beautiful country and fled, like the woman mentioned in the Apocalypse, to these wild mountains, where they have to this day handed down the gospel from father to son in the same purity and simplicity as it was preached by St. Paul (Arnaud, Hugh. *The*



A modern representation of the ancient seal the Valdenses. Note the seven stars with the fourth star (symbolic of the Thyatiran Era) at the top of the lighted gold candle stick. The Latin LUX LUCENT IN TENEBRIS is "Light shines in darkness" (cf. Rev. 2:1) suggesting an awareness of their Church as that depicted in Rev. 2:18-29.

Glorious Recovery by the Vaudois. Translated by Dyke Acland. Reprint of 1827 edition. Kessinger Publishing: 2009).

The Roman Inquisitor, Reinerus Sacho, writing about 1230, held:

The heresy of the Vaudois, or poor people of Lyons, is of great antiquity. Among all sects that either are, or have been, there is none more dangerous to the Church, than that of the Leonists, and that for three reasons: the first is, because it is the sect of the longest standing of any; for some say that it has been continued down ever since the time of Pope Sylvester; and others, ever since that of the apostles. The second is, because it is the most general of all sects; for scarcely is there any country to be found where this sect bath not spread itself. And the third, because it has the greatest appearance of piety; because, in the sight of all, these men are just and honest in their transactions, believe of God what ought to be believed, receive all the articles of the Apostles' Creed, and only profess to hate the Church of Rome" (Gilly, William Stephen. *Our Protestant Forefathers* (Classic Reprint). Forgotten Books 2012:22).

Now it should be obvious, that Reinerus Sacho would not have written as he did, if the Waldenses had originated with Peter Waldo, only seventy-five years before; nor could Waldo's followers have multiplied and spread over the whole world in so short a time, under great persecution, and with so slow means of travel.

Waldo eventually became a minister it would seem in "the Church." One publication produced by the Waldenses was the *Herald of Truth*. In 1184 Emperor Frederick I Barbarossa and Pope Lucius III established Episcopal commissions to control such "heresy" in northern Italy. In 1208 Pope Innocent III launched the Albigensian Crusade or Cathar Crusade (1209-1255), a devastating crusade to eliminate the Valdenses and the Cathars (or Albigenses) of southern France.

C. H. C. Pirie-Gordon in his *Innocent the Great: An Essay on His Life and Times* writes:

Waldenses, however, would seem to have arrived at a far sharper line of cleavage. Their tenets at the time were mainly as follows:



Statue of Peter Waldo at the Luther Memorial at Worms, Germany.

- I. They were not subject to the Roman Pontiff, or to the prelates of the Church of Rome. They could not be excommunicated by any of these. They ought not to obey the Pope when He ordered them to abjure their sect. The Church of Rome sinned in persecuting them.
- II. The prelates of the Church of Rome were blind leaders of the blind, and did not preserve the truth of the Gospel or imitate Apostolic poverty.
- III. The Church of Rome was a house of lies.
- IV. Oaths are unlawful.
- V. Confession to a priest is useless.
- VI. All judgment is forbidden by God; and it is a sin for a man to condemn a fellow-man to death or punishment in any case or for any cause whatever.
- VII. Laymen and women have the right to preach the Gospel.
- VIII. The prayers of the faithful and other good works are of no avail to the dead.
- IX. There is no Purgatory after death, this life being the only Purgatory.
- X. The soul on leaving the body, goes straight to Paradise, or Hell.

In 1350, Walter Lollard, a Waldensian minister moved to England where he engaged in cvangelistic activity. There the Church experienced great growth and then declined under Catholic, Puritan, and Church of England persecution until only a remnant remained. The Inquisition persecuted the Waldensians and they survived only in isolated valleys of Piedmont and Savoy until the Reformation. About 300 years after Waldo's death a frightful crusade devastating what remained (the legacy of the Inquisition). A remnant became Protestant (now Methodists).

Christianity in the High Middle Ages

The *High Middle Ages* was the period of European history around the 11th, 12th, and 13th centuries (ca. 1000–1300). During this time Christianity in the Latin West became totally dominated by the papacy and Roman Catholicism. Pope Gregory VII (pope, 1073-1085) envisioned a world united under papal authority and took steps to make it so but it was Pope Innocent III (pope, 1198-1216) who became the most powerful pope in Catholic history both secularly and religiously. The 1215 Fourth Lateran Council called by Innocent III adopted a canon requiring Jews and Muslims to wear special

dress to enable them to be distinguished from Christians and a canon enacting a procedure and penalties against heretics and their protectors.

The Holy Roman Empire was a group of medieval states in Central Europe, where the King was crowned and the coronation of the King was a ceremony given by the Pope and the Pope at that time crowned the King. There was continual vying for power between the civil authority of the king and the papacy. This was resolved in part in the Concordat of Worms, sometimes called the *Pactum Calixtinum* by papal historians, which was an agreement between Pope Calixtus II and Holy Roman Emperor Henry V on September 23, 1122 near the city of Worms.



Mosaic depiction of Pope Innocent the Great.

The pact brought an end to the first phase of the power struggle between the Papacy and the Holy Roman Emperors and has been interpreted as containing within itself the germ of nation-based sovereignty, the separation of church and state, that would one day be confirmed in the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). In part, this was an unforeseen result of strategic maneuvering between the Roman Catholic Church and the European sovereigns over political control within their domains.

In the High Middle Ages Medieval Europe experienced the imposition of a unified system of Orthodox belief and worship. More or less nearly everyone in Europe was by then Christianized. Those who resisted were condemned, ostracized and often judicially murdered. There was no religious freedom only control of the masses through a false Orthodox religion calling itself Christian. Revelation 16-17 refers to this religious system as a great whore, which included not only the Catholicism of the Latin West and the Orthodox of the Greek East, but the daughter churches which later came out of her in protest (Lutherans, Calvinists and other Protestant sects) in the Protestant Reformation. The most common dating of the Protestant Reformation begins in 1517, when, when Martin Luther published his *The Ninety-Five Theses*, and concludes in 1648 with the Treaty of Westphalia ending many years of European religious wars.

In Revelation 2 we read in antitype of the Thyatiran era of the Church of God, commended for works of "love, service, faith, and your patience" and in terms of its works over the course of about 800 years "the last are more than the first" (Revelation 2:18). As we examine the history of the Thyatirian Christian groups over the course of 800 years we see the Thyatirans arising slowly in southern France and in northern Italy and then in the final years so successful in teaching God's way that they drew the attention and wrath of the Roman Catholic Church and its puppet kings and potentates.

In this section of Revelation the woman Jezebel is a prophetic reference to the Roman Catholic Church (which refers itself as authentic Christianity, as holding the keys to the kingdom of God, and as the Church of God). The "sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols" are the false religious practices, dogmas and doctrines of Greco-Roman Christianity which are here referred to as "the depths of Satan" (Revelation 2:24). This false Church's offspring are all the Protestant groups born in the Reformation and groups arising from them. A major problem in the Thyatiran era (800-1631) was the tendency of its people, even including Peter Waldo himself, to reach some accommodation with the Roman Catholic leadership. Note the concluding admonition: "to the rest in Thyatira, as many as do not have this doctrine, who have not known the depths of Satan, as they say, I will put on you no other burden" (Revelation 2:22).

The despotic ambition of would be kings, emperors, bishops, cardinals and popes and the imposition of the feudal system and forced Catholicism throughout Europe maintained its enslavement. Reformers within the Roman Catholic Church, such as Anselm, Aquinas, and Francis, were religious social workers whose ideals were based on Greek philosophy and human reasoning and not the apostles' doctrines.

Catholic power in the Middle Ages of both the Roman Catholic Church and its civil counterpart of emperors, kings, and princes were maintained by simony (the selling of church offices), the selling of indulgences, threats to excommunicate whole nations as well as individuals, the Inquisition and Crusades. Participation in the Crusades was a means of doing penance. One particularly well-known Catholic method of exploitation was the practice of selling indulgences, a monetary payment as a penalty which, supposedly, absolved one of past sins and/or released one from purgatory after death. It

was the selling of indulgences that led the Reformer Martin Luther to post his famous 95 Theses - a document challenging Roman Catholic authority in theological matters, including indulgences and many others. Luther's opposition to the selling of indulgences, however, was not new. In most of the Reformation movements stress lay not upon new understandings or doctrines, but on a return to tradition.



Illustration is of Waldensians being burned at the stake in Paris.

During the High Middle Ages there was constant tension between the papacy and sovereign kings and princes. The Papacy always sought ultimate power while emperor and king sought to maximize their own independent power. For example, Pope Innocent III, probably the most powerful pope of all time, held that as Christ's vicar, the pope had authority over all temporal things. The main force in the inquisition of Pope Innocent III were the Dominican Order or Dominicans.

Innocent III called for crusades against the Cathari as well as Muslims. After his death, the Synod of Toulouse, which met in November of 1229, about the time of the crusade against the Albigensians, set up the special ecclesiastical tribunal, or court, known as the Inquisition (Lat. *inquisitio*, an inquiry), to search out and try heretics.

In its canon the Council directed in Canon 6 that "the house in which any heretic shall be found shall be destroyed" and in Canon 14 that "We

prohibit also that the laity should be permitted to have the books of the Old or New Testament; unless anyone from motive of devotion should wish to have the Psalter or the Breviary for divine offices or the hours of the blessed Virgin; but we most strictly forbid their having any translation of these books."

Religious enthusiasm was undoubtedly a basic driving force of the Crusades, but in time these came to be seen as "holy pilgrimages" which could serve as penance, a means of receiving indulgences through participation in the Crusade or giving money for its support, and a means to acquiring new land, trade opportunities and political power. Universal peace was not the goal.

Moreover, Medieval Christendom was not a unity, but sharply divided between eastern and western churches. About 1054 the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox churches officially separated. The focus of this chapter is on Roman Catholic Europe for the Thyatiran Era (ca. 800-1631) centered, as we understand in Piedmont and southern France before taking root in Germany and then on to England through the ministry of Walter Lollard.