
Waldensians

Waldensians, Vaudois

The Waldensians, or Vaudois, followers of Peter Waldo of Lyon, provided the next major target. They gave their money to the poor and preached the Christian gospel. Waldo attracted the hatred of the clergy when he commissioned a translation of the Bible into Occitan, the language of what is now southern France. The Waldensians started off as perfectly orthodox Roman Catholics, but after reading the bible their heresies mushroomed. They denied the temporal authority of priests and objected to papal corruption. They rejected numerous accretions, including the Mass, prayers for the dead, indulgences, confessions, penance, church music, the reciting of prayers in Latin, the adoration of saints, the adoration of the sacrament, killing, and the swearing of oaths. They also allowed women to preach. They were excommunicated as heretics in 1184 at the Council of Verona, and persecuted with zeal for centuries.



They were formally declared [schismatics](#) by Pope Lucius III in 1184 at the Synod of Verona. In 1211, more than 80 Waldensians were burned as heretics at Strasbourg. They were declared to be heretics during the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215. The Council stated that their principal error was "contempt for ecclesiastical power", but they were also accused of teaching "innumerable errors" which the council did not specify. Any deviation from Catholic teaching was an "error", and provided sufficient grounds to incur the death penalty. Persecutions were soon stepped up.

Mass Burning of the Waldensians in Toulouse in the 13th century,
by an anonymous 17th Century engraver



In a single day in 1393, 150 Waldensians were burned at Grenoble. Survivors fled to remote valleys in the Alps. In 1487 Pope Innocent VIII issued a bull for the extermination of the Vaudois. In response, Alberto de' Capitanei, archdeacon of Cremona, organized a crusade and launched offensives in the provinces of Dauphine and Piedmont. The areas were devastated and survivors fled to Provence and to southern Italy. On 1 January 1545 King Francis I of France issued an order called the "Arrêt de Mérindol". He assembled an army against the Waldensians of Provence, which carried out another series of massacres. Deaths in the Massacre of Mérindol ranged from hundreds to thousands, depending on the estimates, and several villages were devastated

Persecution of Waldensians in Piedmont

Men, women and children were hanged, drowned, forced over precipices, stabbed or clubbed to death



In January 1655 the Duke of Savoy commanded the Waldensians to attend Mass or remove themselves to the upper valleys, giving them twenty days to sell their houses and lands. The order, in the middle of winter, was intended to force the Waldensians to attend mass, but ; most of them chose to take to the remote upper valleys, Old men, women, little children and the sick "waded through the icy waters, climbed the frozen peaks, and at length reached the homes of their impoverished brethren of the upper Valleys, where they were warmly received." By mid-April, the Duke, having failed in his objective tried another approach. He sent troops into the upper valleys and required that the locals to quarter them in their homes, On 24 April 1655, at 4 a.m., the signal was given for a general massacre. Catholic forces are reported to have unleashed a campaign of looting, rape, torture, and murder. According to a report by a Peter Liegé:



"Little children were torn from the arms of their mothers, clasped by their tiny feet, and their heads dashed against the rocks; or were held between two soldiers and their quivering limbs torn up by main force. Their mangled bodies were then thrown on the highways or fields, to be devoured by beasts. The sick and the aged were burned alive in their dwellings. Some had their hands and arms and legs lopped off, and fire applied to the severed parts to staunch the bleeding and prolong their suffering. Some were flayed alive, some were roasted alive, some disemboweled; or tied to trees in their own orchards, and their hearts cut out. Some were horribly mutilated, and of others the brains were boiled and eaten by these cannibals. Some were fastened down into the furrows of their own fields, and ploughed into the soil as men plough manure into it. Others were buried alive. Fathers were marched to death with the heads of their sons suspended round their necks. Parents were compelled to look on while their children were first outraged [raped], then massacred, before being themselves permitted to die."

Some 1,700 Waldensians were slaughtered. This well documented atrocity became known as the Piedmont Easter. It aroused indignation throughout Europe (and prompted John Milton to write a poem "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont"). Protestant rulers offered sanctuary to surviving Waldensians. Oliver Cromwell threatened to send military forces to their rescue. Councillors of the city of Amsterdam chartered ships to take 167 Waldensians to their colony in the New World (Delaware) on Christmas Day 1656. A few who stayed behind in Piedmont formed a guerilla resistance movement..

The Murder of the children of Waldensians. Detail from Samuel Moreland's "History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piedmont" published in London in 1658.



In Piedmont in the middle of the seventeenth century, further attempts were made to extirpate them. Anyone in Villaro who declined to go to a Roman Catholic Mass was liable to be crucified upside down, but there was some variation in the manner of killing in other towns. Some were maimed and left to die of starvation, some had strips of flesh cut off their bodies until they bled to death, some were stoned, some impaled alive upon stakes or hooks. Daniel Rambaut had his toes and fingers cut off in sections: one joint being amputated each day in an attempt to make him recant and accept the Roman faith. Some had their mouths stuffed with gunpowder, which was then ignited. Paolo Garnier of Roras was castrated, then skinned alive. Children were killed in various ways before the eyes of their parents. Those few who escaped to the mountains were mostly killed by exposure, starvation or disease*.

This image is found on page 345 of Samuel Moreland's "History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piedmont" published in London in 1658. It is one of a number of prints illustrating the massacre of the Waldenses in Provence in 1655. The woman being tortured to death here is Anna, daughter of Giovanni Charboniere of La Torre.



In France, in 1685 Louis XIV revoked the 1598 Edict of Nantes, and more massacres followed, with many more thousands losing their lives for the crime of disagreeing with Catholic doctrine.

Heretics burned at the stake, British Library, Royal 20 E III f.177v, 1487



http://www.badnewsaboutchristianity.com/gbc_heretics.htm

Waldensians

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

Waldensian Evangelical Church



Statue of [Peter Waldo](#) at the Luther Memorial at [Worms, Germany](#).

Founders: [Peter Waldo](#)

Founding date: about 1177; in 1532 acceded to Franco-Swiss Protestant Reform

Headquarters: [Torre Pellice](#), [Piemonte](#), Italy

Countries: Argentina, France, Germany, Italy, United States, and Uruguay

Website: www.chiesavaldese.org

Waldensians, Waldenses, Vallenses^[1] or **Vaudois** are names for a [Christian movement](#) which started in [Lyon](#) and spread soon to the [Cottian Alps](#) in the late 1170s.

The movement, named after founder [Peter Waldo](#), advocated an adherence to the Gospel that led to conflicts with the Roman Catholic Church. By 1215, the Waldensians were declared heretical and subject to persecution.

During the [Protestant Reformation](#), Waldensian leaders joined the Reformed church. Thus the movement adopted many of the [Calvinist](#) tenets and became a Protestant denomination.

Currently, active congregations remain in Europe, South America, and North America, most under the label of the [Waldensian Evangelical Church](#). Organizations, such as the American Waldensian Society, exist to maintain the history of this movement, with the declared goals of "proclaiming the Christian Gospel, serving the marginalized, promoting social justice, fostering inter-religious work, and advocating respect for religious diversity and freedom of conscience."^[2]

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History

Origins

According to the legend, Waldo renounced his wealth to preach.^[3] Because of the shunning of the wealth of the Roman Catholic Church clergy, the movement was early known as *The Poor of Lyon* and *The Poor of Lombardy*.

The Waldensian movement was characterized from the beginning by lay preaching, voluntary poverty, and strict adherence to the Bible. Between 1175-1185 Peter Waldo either commissioned a cleric from Lyons to translate the New Testament into the vernacular, the Arpitan (Franco-Provençal) language, or was himself involved in this translation work.

In 1179, Waldo and one of his disciples went to Rome where they were welcomed by Pope Alexander III and the Roman Curia. They had to explain their faith before a panel of three clergymen, including issues which were then debated within the Church, such as the universal priesthood, the gospel in the vulgar tongue, and the issue of voluntary poverty. The results of the meeting were inconclusive, and Waldo's ideas, but not the movement itself, were condemned at the Third Lateran Council in the same year, though the leaders of the movement had not been yet excommunicated.^[4]

They disobeyed and continued to preach according to their own understanding of the Scriptures. By the early 1180s Waldo and his followers were [excommunicated](#) and forced from Lyon. The Roman Catholic Church declared them heretics — stating the group's principal error was contempt for [ecclesiastical](#) power. The Waldensians were also accused by the [Catholic Church](#) of teaching innumerable errors.^[5]

Waldo and his followers developed a system whereby they would go from town to town and meet secretly with small groups of Waldensians. There they would confess sins and hold service. A traveling Waldensian preacher was known as a *barba*. The group would shelter and house the *barba* and help make arrangements to move on to the next town in secret.^[6] Waldo possibly died in the

early 13th century, possibly in Germany, but he was never captured, and his fate remains uncertain.

The early Waldensians were divided into three types of activity: *Sandaliati* (namely, those with sandals), who received sacred orders and were to prove the [heresiarchs](#) wrong; *Doctores*, who instructed and trained missionaries; and *Novellani*, who preached to the general population.^[7] They were also called *Insabbatati*, *Sabati*, *Inzabbatati* *Sabotiers* due to the unusual type of [sabat](#) they used as footwear.^{[8][9][10]}

Much of what is known about the early Waldensians comes from reports like the *Profession of faith of Valdo of Lyon* (1180); Durando d'Osca *Liber antiheresis* (1187-1200 ca.); and the *Rescriptum* of Bergamo Conference (1218). Other earlier documents also attest the Waldensian history, such as the *Will of Stefano d'Anse* (1187); the *Manifestatio haeresis Albigensium et Lugdunensium* (1206-08 ca.); the *Anonymous chronicle of Laon* (1220 ca.). Another source is Reinerius Saccho (died 1259), a former [Cathar](#) who converted to Catholicism and wrote two reports for the [Inquisition](#), *Summa de Catharis et Pauperibus de Lugduno*-- "On the Cathars and the Poor of Lyons" (1254)^[11]

Some early Protestants felt a spiritual kinship to the Waldensians and wrote positively about the Waldensians. [John Milton](#), for example, wrote his "[On the Late Massacre in Piedmont](#)" to depict the massacre and persecution of the Waldensians.

Some [Anabaptists](#) and [Baptists](#) authors have pointed to the Waldensians as an example of earlier Christians who were not a part of the Roman Catholic Church, and held beliefs they interpreted to be similar to their own. In the 17th-19th centuries, Dutch and German Mennonites writers like van Braght ([Martyrs Mirror](#)- 1660)^[12] and S. B. ten Cate (*Geschiedkundig Onderzoek*) linked Anabaptist origins to the Waldensians. Baptist authors like John L. Waller also linked their origins to the Waldensians.^{[13][14][15][16][17][18][19]}

[James Aitken Wylie](#) (1808–1890) likewise believed the Waldensians preserved the apostolic faith during the [Middle Ages](#).^[20] Still later, [Seventh-day Adventist Ellen G. White](#) taught that the Waldenses were preservers of biblical truth during the [Great Apostasy](#) of the [Roman Catholic Church](#).^[21] She believed that the Waldenses kept the [seventh-day Sabbath](#), engaged in widespread missionary activity, and "planted the seeds of the Reformation" in Europe.^{[22][23]}

Scholar Michael W. Homer links the belief in an ancient origin to the Waldensians to three 17th century pastors, Jean-Paul Perrin of the [Reformed Church of France](#) and the Waldensian pastors Pierre Gilles and Jean Léger, who posited that the Waldensians were descendants of [Primitive Christianity](#).^[24]

Some authors ^{[25][26]} try to date a Reformation-era Waldensian confession of faith back into the Middle Ages in 1120 to assert their claim of doctrinal antiquity.^[27] However, it is undisputable in the current historiography from Waldensians themselves that this confession was drafted in 1531.^{[28][29]}

Teachings

Waldensians held and preached a number of truths as they read from the Bible. Some of these were:

1. The atoning death and justifying righteousness of Christ
2. The Godhead
3. The fall of man
4. The incarnation of the Son
5. They denied purgatory and said it was the 'invention of the Antichrist'.^[30]
6. Valued [voluntary poverty](#)

They held that ... temporal offices and dignities were not meant for preachers of the Gospel; that relics were simply rotten bones which had belonged to one knew not whom; that to go on pilgrimage served no end, save to empty one's purse; that flesh might be eaten any day if one's appetite served him; that holy water was not a whit more efficacious than rain water; and that prayer

in a barn was just as effectual as if offered in a church. They were accused, moreover, of having scoffed at the doctrine of [transubstantiation](#), and of having spoken blasphemously of the Roman Catholic Church as the harlot of the apocalypse.[31]

The "[La nobla leyczon](#)" written in [Occitan](#) language dated between 1190 and 1240,[32] is a sample of the medieval Waldensian belief. It is housed at University of Cambridge.[33]

Catholic reaction and response



Illustrations depicting Waldensians as [witches](#) in *Le champion des dames*, by Martin Le France, 1451.

Seen by the Roman Catholic Church as unorthodox, the Waldensians were formally declared [heretics](#) by [Pope Lucius III](#) in 1184 at the [Synod of Verona](#), and by [Pope Innocent III](#) during the [Fourth Lateran Council](#) in 1215.[4] In 1211, more than 80 Waldensians were burned as heretics at [Strasbourg](#), beginning several centuries of [persecution](#) that nearly destroyed the movement.[34] Part of their legacy is recognized as works of the writer [Henri Arnaud](#). The Waldensian Church of Italy has survived to the present day.[35]

1487 order of extermination

In 1487 Pope [Innocent VIII](#) issued a bull for the extermination of the Vaudois. [Alberto de' Capitanei](#), archdeacon of [Cremona](#), responded to the bull by organizing a crusade to complete the process and launched an offensive in the provinces of [Dauphiné](#) and [Piedmont](#). [Charles I, Duke of Savoy](#), eventually interfered to save his territories from further confusion and promised the Vaudois peace. But the offensive had devastated the area, and many of the Vaudois fled to Provence and to southern Italy.

Reformation

When the news of the [Reformation](#) reached the Waldensian Valleys, the Tavola Valdese[36] decided to seek fellowship with the nascent Protestantism. A meeting held in 1526 in Laus, a town in the Chisone valley, and decided to send envoys to examine the new movement.

In 1532 they met with German and Swiss Protestants and ultimately adapted their beliefs to those of the Reformed Church.

The Swiss and French Reformed churches sent [William Farel](#) and [Anthony Saunier](#) to attend the meeting of Chanforan, which convened on 12 October 1532. Farel invited them to join the Reformation and to leave secrecy. A Confession of Faith, with Reformed doctrines, was formulated and the Waldensians decided to worship openly in French.

The French Bible translated by [Pierre Robert Olivétan](#) with the help of [Calvin](#) and published at [Neuchâtel](#) in 1535 was based in part on a New Testament in the Waldensian vernacular. The cost of its publication was defrayed by the churches in Waldensia who collected the sum of 1500 gold crowns for this purpose.^[37]

Massacre of Mérindol (1545)

Main article: [Massacre of Mérindol](#)



[Massacre of the Waldensians of Mérindol](#) in 1545.

Outside the Piedmont, the Waldenses joined the local Protestant churches in Bohemia, France, and Germany. After they came out of seclusion and reports were made of [sedition](#) on their part, the French king, [Francis I](#) issued on 1 January 1545 the "Arrêt de Mérindol", and assembled an army against the Waldensians of [Provence](#). The leaders in the 1545 massacres were [Jean Maynier d'Oppède](#), First President of the parlement of [Provence](#), and the military commander [Antoine Escalin des Aimars](#) who was returning from the [Italian Wars](#) with 2,000 veterans, the *Bandes de Piémont*. Deaths in the [Massacre of Mérindol](#) ranged from hundreds to thousands, depending on the estimates, and several villages were devastated.^[38]

The treaty of 5 June 1561 granted amnesty to the Protestants of the Valleys, including liberty of conscience and [freedom to worship](#). Prisoners were released and fugitives were permitted to return home. But despite this treaty, the Vaudois, with the other French Protestants, still suffered during the [French Wars of Religion](#) of 1562–1598.

As early as 1631, Protestant scholars began to regard the Waldensians as early forerunners of the Reformation, in a similar manner to how the followers of [John Wycliffe](#) and [Jan Hus](#) - who were also persecuted by Roman Catholic authorities - were viewed.

Although the Waldensian church was granted some rights and freedoms under French King, Henry IV, with the [Edict of Nantes](#) in 1598, Catholic persecution rose again in the 17th century, with an extermination of the Waldensians attempted by the Duke of Savoy in 1655. This led to an exodus and dispersion of the Waldensians to other parts of Europe and even to the Western hemisphere.

Piedmont Easter

In January 1655 the [Duke of Savoy](#) commanded the Waldensians to attend Mass or remove to the upper valleys of their homeland, giving them twenty days in which to sell their lands. Being in the midst of winter, the order, of course, was intended to persuade the Vaudois to choose the former; however, the bulk of the populace instead chose the latter, abandoning their homes and lands in the lower valleys and removing to the upper valleys. It was written that these targets of persecution, including old men, women, little children and the sick "waded through the icy waters, climbed the frozen peaks, and at length reached the homes of their impoverished brethren of the upper Valleys, where they were warmly received."

By mid-April, when it became clear that the Duke's efforts to force the Vaudois to conform to Catholicism had failed, he tried another approach. Under the guise of false reports of Vaudois uprisings, the Duke sent troops into the upper valleys to quell the local populace. He required that the local populace quarter the troops in their homes, which the local populace complied with. But the quartering order was a ruse to allow the troops easy access to the populace. On 24 April 1655, at 4 a.m., the signal was given for a general massacre.



Print illustrating the 1655 massacre in La Torre, from [Samuel Morelands](#) "History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piemont" published in London in 1658.

The Catholic forces did not simply slaughter the inhabitants. They are reported to have unleashed an unprovoked campaign of looting, rape, torture, and murder. According to one report by a Peter Liégé:

Little children were torn from the arms of their mothers, clasped by their tiny feet, and their heads dashed against the rocks; or were held between two soldiers and their quivering limbs torn up by main force. Their mangled bodies were then thrown on the highways or fields, to be devoured by beasts. The sick and the aged were burned alive in their dwellings. Some had their hands and arms and legs lopped off, and fire applied to the severed parts to staunch the bleeding and prolong their suffering. Some were flayed alive, some were roasted alive, some disemboweled; or tied to trees in their own orchards, and their hearts cut out. Some were horribly mutilated, and of others the brains were boiled and eaten by these cannibals. Some were fastened down into the furrows of their own fields, and ploughed into the soil as men plough manure into it. Others were buried alive. Fathers were marched to death with the heads of their sons suspended round their necks. Parents were compelled to look on while their children were first outraged [raped], then massacred, before being themselves permitted to die.

This massacre became known as the *Piedmont Easter*. An estimate of some 1,700 Waldensians were slaughtered; the massacre was so brutal it aroused indignation throughout Europe. Protestant rulers in northern Europe offered sanctuary to the remaining Waldensians. [Oliver Cromwell](#), then ruler in England, began petitioning on behalf of the Waldensians; writing letters, raising contributions, calling a general fast in England and threatening to send military forces to the rescue. (The massacre prompted [John Milton](#)'s famous poem on the Waldenses, "[On the Late Massacre in Piedmont](#)".)[40] Swiss and Dutch Calvinists set up an 'underground railroad' to bring many of the survivors north to Switzerland and even as far as the Dutch Republic, where the councillors of the city of Amsterdam chartered three ships to take some 167 Waldensians to their City Colony in the New World (Delaware) on Christmas Day 1656.[41] Those that stayed behind in France and the Piedmont formed a guerilla resistance movement led by a farmer, [Joshua Janavel](#), which lasted into the 1660s.[42]



Waldensian Church of Florence, Italy

Revocation of the Edict of Nantes and the "Glorious Return"

In 1685 [Louis XIV](#) revoked the 1598 [Edict of Nantes](#), which had guaranteed freedom of religion to his Protestant subjects in France. French troops sent into the French Waldensian areas of the Chisone and Susa Valleys in the [Dauphiné](#) caused the "conversion" of 8,000 Vaudois to accept Catholicism and another 3,000 to leave for Germany.

In the Piedmont, the cousin of Louis, the newly ascended [Duke of Savoy, Victor Amadeus II](#), followed his uncle in removing the protection of Protestants in the [Piedmont](#). In the renewed persecution, and in an echo of the Piedmont Easter Massacre of only three decades earlier, the Duke issued an edict on January 31, 1686 that decreed the destruction of all the Vaudois churches and that all inhabitants of the Valleys should publicly announce their error in religion within 15 days under penalty of death and banishment. But the Vaudois remained resistant. After the 15 days, an army of 9,000 French and Piedmontese soldiers invaded the Valleys against the estimated 2,500 Vaudois, but found that every village had organized a defense force that kept the French and Piedmontese soldiers at bay.

On April 9, the Duke of Savoy issued a new edict, enjoining the Waldensians to put down their arms within eight days and go into exile between April 21 and 23. If able, they were free to sell their land and possessions to the highest bidder.

Waldensian pastor [Henri Arnaud](#), who had been driven out of the Piedmont in the earlier purges, returned from Holland. On April 18 he made a stirring appeal before an assembly at Roccapiatta, winning over the majority in favor of armed resistance. When the truce expired on April 20, the

Waldensians were prepared for battle.

They put up a brave fight over the next six weeks. But when the Duke retired to Turin on June 8, the war seemed decided: 2,000 Waldensians had been killed; another 2,000 had "accepted" the Catholic theology of the Council of Trent. Another 8,000 had been imprisoned, of which more than half would die of deliberately imposed starvation, or of sickness within six months.

But about two or three hundred Vaudois fled to the hills and began carrying out a guerilla war over the next year against the Catholic settlers that arrived to take over the Vaudois lands. These "Invincibles" continued their assaults until the Duke finally relented and agreed to negotiate. The "Invincibles" won the right for the imprisoned Vaudois to be released from prison and be provided safe passage to Geneva. But the Duke, granting that permission on 3 January 1687, required that the Vaudois leave immediately or convert to Roman Catholicism. This edict led to some 2,800 Vaudois leaving the Piedmont for Geneva, of which only 2,490 would survive the journey.

From Geneva, Arnaud sought help from [William of Orange](#), who with other European leaders had become fed up with the militarism of French King Louis XIV and formed the [League of Augsburg](#) in 1686 to counter the French King's territorial ambitions. William was receptive to his entreaties and decided to include the Waldensian exiles in his war campaign. In the midst of the wars between the [League of Augsburg](#) and France in August 1689, Arnaud led 1,000 Swiss exiles, armed with modern weaponry provided by the Dutch, back to the Piedmont. Over 30% of the force perished during the 130-mile trek. They successfully re-established their presence in the Piedmont and drove out the Catholic settlers, but they continued to be besieged by French and Piedmontese troops.

By 2 May 1689, with only 300 Waldensian troops remaining and cornered on a high peak, called the [Balsiglia](#), by 4,000 French troops with cannons, the final assault was delayed by storm and then by cloud cover. The French commander was so confident of completing his job the next morning that he sent a message to Paris that the Waldensian force had already been destroyed. However, when the French awoke the next morning they discovered that the Waldensians, guided by one of their number familiar with the [Balsiglia](#), had already descended from the peak during the night and were now miles away.

The French pursued, but only a few days later a sudden change of political alliance by the Duke, from France to the League of Augsburg, ended the French pursuit of the Waldensians. The Duke agreed to defend the Waldensians and called for all other Vaudois exiles to return home to help protect the Piedmont borders against the French, in what came to be known as the "Glorious Return".^[43]

Religious freedom after the French Revolution



Waldensian Church entrance in Rome, Italy

After the [French Revolution](#), the Waldenses of Piedmont were assured liberty of conscience and, in 1848, the ruler of Savoy, King [Charles Albert of Sardinia](#) granted them civil rights.

Enjoying religious freedom, the Waldensians began migrating outside their valleys. By the time of [Italian unification](#), the Waldensian had congregations throughout the peninsula, some originated by

preaching, others by migration.[44] However, poverty, societal discrimination, and demographic pressure led the Waldensians to immigrate, first as seasonal workers to the French Riviera and Switzerland, and later to [Colonia Valdense](#) in Uruguay and ultimately, to the United States.[45] Those who remained in Italy have experienced social ascension. Waldensian companies dominated Turin's chocolate industry for the latter half of the nineteenth century and are generally credited with the invention of [gianduja](#) (hazelnut chocolate).[46]

Waldensian scholarship also flourished in the nineteenth century. Copies of the [Romaunt](#) version of the [Gospel of John](#) were preserved in Paris and Dublin. The manuscripts were used as the basis of a work by Gilly published in 1848, in which he described the history of the New Testament in use by the Waldensians.[47] The Waldensian College began training ministers in 1855, first in [Torre Pellice](#). A few years later, the Waldensian College relocated to [Florence](#) and, in 1922, to Rome. Economic and social integration have eased acceptance of ethnic Waldensians into Italian society. Writers like [Italo Calvino](#) and politicians like [Domenico Maselli](#) and [Valdo Spini](#) are of Waldensian background. The church has also attracted intellectuals as new adherents, like the philosopher [Gianni Vattimo](#).

Characteristics of the modern Waldensian Church

The present Waldensian Church considers itself to be a Christian Protestant church of the Reformed tradition originally framed by [Huldrych Zwingli](#) and [John Calvin](#). [4] It recognizes as its doctrinal standard the confession of faith published in 1655 and based on the Reformed confession of 1559. It admits only two ceremonies, baptism and the Lord's Supper.[4] Supreme authority in the body is exercised by an annual synod, and the affairs of the individual congregations are administered by a [consistory](#) under the presidency of the pastor.[4]

Over the centuries, Waldensian churches have been established in countries as far away from France as Uruguay and the United States where the active Waldensian congregations continue the purpose of the Waldensian movement. The contemporary and historic Waldensian spiritual heritage describes itself as proclaiming the Gospel, serving the marginalized, promoting social justice, fostering inter-religious work, and advocating respect for religious diversity and freedom of conscience.[2] Today, the Waldensian Church is member of the [World Alliance of Reformed Churches](#), the [World Methodist Council](#), the [Federation of Evangelical Churches in Italy](#), and the [World Council of Churches](#).

Waldensians by region

Italy



The Waldensian Church in Milan, built in 1949, incorporates materials from the demolished gothic church of [San Giovanni in Conca](#).

In 1848, after many centuries of harsh persecution, the Waldensians acquired legal freedom in the [Kingdom of Piedmont-Sardinia](#) as a result of the liberalising reforms which followed [Charles Albert of Sardinia](#)'s granting a constitution (the [Statuto Albertino](#)). Subsequently the [Waldensian Evangelical Church](#), as it became known, developed and spread through the Italian peninsula.

The Waldensian church was able to gain converts by building schools in some of the poorer regions of Italy, including Sicily. There is still a Waldensian church in the town of [Grotte, Province of Agrigento](#) at the southwest part of the island.[48]

During the [Nazi](#) occupation of North Italy in the [Second World War](#), Italian Waldensians were active in saving [Jews](#) faced with imminent extermination, hiding many of them in the same mountain valley where their own Waldensian ancestors had found refuge in earlier generations.[49]

In 1975 the Waldensian Church joined the [Italian Methodist Church](#) to form the [Union of Waldensian and Methodist Churches](#). It has 50,000 members (45,000 Waldensians, of whom 30,000 in Italy and some 15,000 divided between Argentina and Uruguay, and 5,000 Methodists).

South America

The first Waldensian settlers from Italy arrived in South America in 1856 and today the Waldensian Church of the [Río de La Plata](#) (which forms a united church with the Waldensian Evangelical Church) has approximately 40 congregations and 15,000 members shared between [Uruguay](#) and [Argentina](#). [50]

United States of America

Since colonial times there have been Waldensians who found freedom on American shores, as marked by the presence of them in [New Jersey](#) and [Delaware](#). Many Waldensians, having escaped persecution in their homelands by making their way to the tolerant Dutch Republic, went to start anew in the [New Netherland](#) colony. In the late 19th century many Italians, among them Waldensians, emigrated to the United States. They founded communities in New York City, Boston, [Chicago](#), [Monett](#), [Galveston](#), [Rochester](#) and [Salt Lake City](#). [51] The [Monett congregation](#) was among the first to be established in the United States, in 1875, by some 40 settlers who had formed the original South American settlement in Uruguay in the 1850s, and who had fled violence in the Uruguayan countryside, traveling first back to Europe then across the Northern Atlantic to New York and by train to southern Missouri. Waldensians living in the Cottian Alps region of Northern Italy continued to migrate to Monett until the early 1900s, augmenting the original colony, and founded another, larger settlement in [Valdese, North Carolina](#) in 1893. Both the Monett and Valdese congregations use the name [Waldensian Presbyterian Church](#).

In 1853 a group of approximately 70 Waldensians, including men, women, and children left their homes in the Piedmont Valleys and migrated to Salt Lake City, [Utah](#), after being converted to Mormonism by [Lorenzo Snow](#). These Waldensians maintained their cultural heritage, while passing on their mixture of Mormon and Waldensian faiths to their descendants. These descendants still consider themselves both Mormon and Waldensian, and have met occasionally over the many decades to celebrate both heritages. [52][53][54][55]

In 1906, through the initiative of church forces in New York City, Waldensian interest groups were invited to coalesce into a new entity, The American Waldensian Aid Society (AWS), organized "to collect funds and apply the same to the aid of the Waldensian Church in Italy and elsewhere ... and to arouse and maintain interest throughout the US in the work of said Church." Today, this organization continues as the American Waldensian Society. The American Waldensian Society recently marked its Centennial with a conference and celebrations in New York City.

By the 1920s most of the Waldensian churches and missions merged into the [Presbyterian Church](#) due to the cultural assimilation of the second and third generations.

The work of the American Waldensian Society continues in the United States today. The American Waldensian Society aims to foster dialogue and partnership among Waldensian Churches in Italy and South America and Christian churches within North America in order to promote a compelling vision of Waldensian Christian witness for North America. Thus, the American Waldensian Society makes public the contemporary and historic heritage to which Waldensian spirituality is committed: Tell the Story; Encourage 'Crossings'; and Provide Financial Support.[\[56\]](#)

The best known Waldensian Churches in America were in New York, Monett, Missouri and in Valdeese, North Carolina. The church in New York City was disbanded by the mid-1990s.[\[57\]](#)

The American Waldensian Society assists churches, organizations and families in the promotion of Waldensian history and culture. The society allies with those who work to preserve their millennial heritage among their descendants. For example, over the course of 45 years, the Old Colony Players in [Valdeese, North Carolina](#), have staged *From this Day Forward*, an outdoor drama telling the story of the Waldenses and the founding of Valdeese.

The Waldensian Presbyterian churches in the United States and the American Waldensian Society have links with the Italian-based [Waldensian Evangelical Church](#), but, unlike the South American Waldensian communities, today they are independent institutions from the European organization.

Germany

In 1698 approximately 3,000-3,200 Waldenses fled from Italy and came to [South Rhine valley](#). Most of them returned to their [Piedmont](#) valleys, but those who remained in Germany were assimilated by the State Churches (Lutheran and Reformed) and 10 congregations exist today as part of the [Evangelische Kirche in Deutschland](#).