

**WALDENSIANISM AND ENGLISH PROTESTANTS: THE
CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY AND CONTINUITY**

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Submitted to the Faculty of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the MA degree in History with Specialization in Medieval and
Renaissance Studies

University of Ottawa

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ABSTRACT

In 1655 and again in 1686-1689, the Waldensians of Piedmont were massacred by the Duke of Savoy after he issued edicts forbidding the practice of their religion. The Waldensians were later followers of the medieval religious movement of the Poor of Lyons, declared heretical in 1215. The Waldensians associated with the Reformation in 1532, and thus formed a link with diverse groups of Protestants across Europe. In the periods immediately surrounding both massacres, an outpouring of publications dedicated to their plight, their history, and their religious identity appeared, a large number of which emerged in London. On both occasions, the propaganda gave rise to international sympathy and encouraged international intervention, eventually provoking the Duke to rescind the edicts that had instigated the massacres.

While most contemporary scholars consider the Waldensians to have been fully absorbed into Protestantism after 1532, it is clear from the writings of both the Waldensians and their sympathizers that they considered themselves a separate entity: the inheritors of a long tradition of dissent from the Catholic Church based on their own belief in the purity of the Gospel.

The Waldensian identity was based on a history of exclusion and persecution, and also on a belief that they had transmitted the true embodiment of Christianity through the centuries. The documents that were published surrounding the massacres address the legitimacy of the Waldensian identity based on centuries of practice. English and continental Protestants identified with the Waldensians, who provided ancient ties and legitimacy to their ‘new’ religion, and the Waldensians adopted that identity proudly, all the while claiming

continuity. Protestants also used the Waldensians in propagandist documents, most often to justify political or religious actions and ideologies.

The continuity of Waldensianism through the Reformation became crucially important for the wider umbrella of Protestantism as a legitimizing factor for the movement. This thesis investigates the claims of continuity and finds that while the Waldensians underwent a dramatic change in religious doctrine to conform to the Reformation, their belief in the continuity of their religious identity can be validated by examining religion from a socio-cultural perspective that takes aspects other than theology into consideration.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I'd like to thank my superb supervisor, Professor Kouky Fianu, for guiding and advising me through this learning experience. She has been incredibly helpful in focusing my scattered thoughts and ideas, and I can't thank her enough.

To my extraordinary parents: I could not have done this without you. Literally. I don't know anyone else who would selflessly put so much time and energy towards supporting their demanding offspring through this process. You have been more inspirational and encouraging than you know. Thank you, thank you, thank you.

To my wonderful brother Zack: Your dedication to your scholarly endeavours constantly amazes me and puts my own efforts to shame. You gave me a level of motivation to aspire to (although realistically I never got there, having spent not one single night sleeping on my desk at school). Thanks for providing an excuse for a much-needed vacation. You're the best and most encouraging little brother a girl could ask for.

To my friends: you've made the last years wonderfully fun. You made me happy to come back to reality after spending my days immersed in the past. Special thanks to Alec, Kristi, Devon, Eric, Stats, and Andrée for their advice on more academic matters.

To my amazing labmates Beth, Kristin, Hannah, Bruno, Lori, and Caroline: you've provided me with endless amusement and much support. Thanks for keeping me sane on a day-to-day basis.

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NOTES

I have kept the quotations in this thesis as they were found in the manuscripts: italicized words, bold words, misspellings, variant word forms, and grammatical errors are all copied verbatim from the original version and are not due to oversight on my part. I have not, however, transcribed such features as the ‘f’.

All page numbers cited in primary documents sourced from Early English Books Online represent the image number from that database rather than the pages of the document itself, as those numbers are both inconsistent and often difficult to locate.

INTRODUCTION: TELLING THE WALDENSIANS' STORY

“The whole History of the Subsistence, Deliverance and Victories of these Protestants in the Vallies, is a continued Miracle, and would make a good Protestant of a profess’d Atheist...”¹

The infamous Wars of Religion that divided Europe in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries can trace their beginnings to religious dissensions that had been simmering for centuries. Many groups the Catholic Church declared to be heretics had been pushing a vaguely ‘Reformist’ agenda for centuries, but they had largely been marginalized or eradicated by the powerful engine of the Church. When Martin Luther successfully launched the processes known as the Reformation in 1517, he was building on centuries of dissent and disillusionment for which splinter groups had long been persecuted. One of the most influential and widespread of these movements was the Waldensian dissent, which professed to have maintained the Word of Christ through centuries of Catholic persecution.

Waldensianism was unique among medieval heresies to persist and survive until the Reformation, and because of this distinction its adherents began to play an important role in Protestant rhetoric. Protestant populations professed a connection with the Piedmontese group; the history of the Waldensians suddenly became Protestant history, and they were taken into the hearts of the English.² For our purposes the English interest in the Waldensians is the most significant because of a rich documentation. When members of the group were massacred in 1655 and 1686-1689, the resulting wave of interest reflected the empathy Protestants (particularly the English) held for the Waldensians. But why did the English

¹ Henri Arnaud, *The Present state of the Vaudois, drawn out of the three letters* (London: Joseph Watt, 1691), 1.

² There were other locales where Waldensianism occurred, but we will concentrate on the Piedmontese group that survived after the Reformation; the continuity of this group is our focus.

identify so deeply with a group of medieval heretics living hundreds of kilometers from them? What importance could the Waldensians possibly represent?

This thesis seeks to investigate the role the Waldensian identity played in the larger Protestant development, and investigates the veracity of the idea of continuity from a *Longue Durée* perspective.³ The Waldensians based their identity on the claim that they had maintained their faith from its inception through the Reformation, but this claim has been heavily disputed by their detractors and by modern historians. To begin our journey through the complicated web of religious myth, legend, and reality, we must explore the history of the Waldensians and understand how their history of persecution reinforced their sense of identity.

In Lyons around 1170, a rich merchant by the name of Valdès ostensibly experienced a religious epiphany. Valdès was inspired to change his life and made very public demonstrations of his newfound piety and renunciation of wealth. He gave up his worldly possessions to beg for alms, and began preaching in Lyons.⁴ His message of poverty and the purity of the Gospel soon inspired others to take up his cause, and they became known collectively as the Poor of Lyons. The group encompassed both men and women in far more egalitarian roles than did the Church.⁵ Valdès believed in poverty, preaching, and the inviolability of the Holy Scriptures; these three beliefs would become the foundations of the movement. Preaching, in particular, became the hallmark of his followers. All those who ascribed to his movement – both men and women - were ‘licensed’ to preach, as Valdès

³ *Longue Durée* history gives priority to long-term historical structures over events. The *Longue Durée*, used by the French Annales School, concentrates on all-but-permanent or slowly evolving structures and offers a return to a broader view of history. I have used this approach to study the Waldensians as a gradually evolving entity over centuries, rather than by breaking down their history into separate, seemingly unconnected eras.

⁴ Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 15.

⁵ Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival* Trans. Claire Davison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 10.

believed in the priesthood of all believers. Valdès believed that the Word of God was the ultimate source of true religion, and he wanted to follow the gospels as closely as possible. In his opinion, which was later shared by his brethren, “the Word of God was to be heard precisely and wholly. His Word was clear; there was no need whatsoever to interpret it. What mattered, so that they might apply it, was to understand it... Once translated into a comprehensible language, the Word of God had to be applied to the letter.”⁶ This faith in the Scriptures was to become the central tenet of Waldensianism.

Valdès did not profess a new system of religious belief, but rather conformed to Catholic ideals with a few notable exceptions, the most important being his adherence to the principles of Donatism: he believed in the holiness of all seven sacraments, but only if they were administered by a priest in a perfect state. A priest living in a sinful state, Valdès claimed, was less qualified to administer the sacraments than a pure layperson.⁷

Despite this, the group initially received a positive response from the Church, which was dealing with the Albigensian threat at that time.⁸ The Poor of Lyons had a decidedly anti-Albigensian stance, and initially the Church accepted and even promoted the Poor’s passionate preaching as a means of combating the encroaching heresy. Valdès’ movement gathered a great deal of attention and spread rapidly across France, the Italian states, the Germanic states, and even into Bohemia and Moravia; unlike the more localized Albigensian heresy, Waldensianism became a cross-cultural pan-European phenomenon.

Despite the Poor’s proclamations of loyalty, their actions soon began to chafe against the established hierarchy of the Church. The Poor had become, by the late twelfth century, a

⁶ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 11.

⁷ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 18.

⁸ ‘Albigensian’ (now commonly known as ‘Cathar’) refers to the 11th and 12th century dissenting pseudo-Christian sect with dualistic and Gnostic elements in Languedoc. The Catholic Church led a series of crusades against the group.

group of itinerant lay people, both men and women, who preached the word of the Gospel. This was precisely what the Church did not want: the basis of the Church's power lay within its ability to provide a unique conduit to God. Should that connection prove to be easily circumvented and made accessible to any layperson, the hierarchy would collapse.⁹ In 1179, the Church imposed a restriction to keep the Poor from spreading the Word of God indiscriminately: Pope Alexander III approved their intentions, but forbade preaching without authorization from the local clergy.¹⁰ Local clergy did not favour the Poor, but the Waldensians were committed to their evangelical mission and continued to preach without authorization. Because of their unorthodox practices, Pope Lucius III pronounced an anathema, declaring them schismatics in 1184, and their excommunication as heretics was finalized at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215.¹¹

In 1218, the now-widespread Waldensian community convened a conference in Bergamo to address their excommunication and the possibility of attempting a reconciliation with the Church. Instead of reunion with the Church, however, the Poor decided to resolve differences between conflicting views within their own movement, and solidified their withdrawal from mainstream Catholicism.¹²

Following their excommunication and subsequent expulsion from Lyons, the Poor adopted a new strategy for survival. They settled in clandestine communities in the diaspora as a means of surviving the persecutions and crusades of the Middle Ages. The Waldensians' practice of women acting as religious leaders disappeared with their retreat into secrecy. As a clandestine sect, the Waldensians could neither preach publicly nor maintain the itinerant

⁹ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 17.

¹⁰ Giovanni Gonnet and Amedeo Molnar, *Les Vaudois au Moyen Age* (Torino: Claudiana, 1974), 49.

¹¹ Audisio, *Dissent*, 22.

¹² *Ibid.*, 27.

lifestyle that had been their practice; instead they adapted to an agricultural and crafts-based lifestyle in small rural communities across Europe.¹³ The Poor committed themselves to maintaining, rather than spreading, the Word. They met in secret, practiced endogamy to keep the community alive, and lived a double life, all the while maintaining the outward perception that they were loyal Catholics.¹⁴ Their initial sincere loyalty and attachment to Catholicism disappeared as the Poor were increasingly marginalized and held in contempt after their anathema. After 1218, when hope of reconciliation with the Church had disappeared, they began to define themselves *against* the Church rather than as a supplementary body to it. They spread into a diaspora across Europe, concentrated particularly in Bohemia and in the mountainous regions of Piedmont and the Dauphiné, first under the jurisdiction of France and later under the control of the Duchy of Savoy.¹⁵ The Waldensians were ruthlessly pursued by a series of inquisitions throughout the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries. In many areas, they were wiped out. They were not entirely without sympathizers, however. The Papal Schism of 1378-1417 created a wave of anticlericalism that swept the continent, giving the Waldensians a place in a greater tradition of dissent.¹⁶

The Waldensians in the diaspora communicated via a select few itinerant preacher-leaders they called *barbes*.¹⁷ These *barbes* became the most important tool of communication

¹³ Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and Clarendon Press, 1984), 11-12.

¹⁴ Audisio, *Dissent*, 26. Endogamy is the practice of marrying within a specific ethnic group, class, or social group, here specifically applying to marriage within known Waldensian circles.

¹⁵ The Waldensians were found in more areas than Piedmont and Bohemia, and this has given rise to the historiographical debate over ‘Waldensianism’ vs. ‘Waldensianisms’. This debate will not be addressed in this thesis, as it concerns the evolution(s) of the wider diaspora rather than of this one specific group which is our focus.

¹⁶ Maurice Pezet, *L’Épopée des Vaudois* (Paris: Editions Seghers, 1976), 91.

¹⁷ Gabriel Audisio, *Preachers by Night: The Waldensian Barbes* Trans. Claire Davison (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 94-96.

between the scattered groups of the Poor. They replaced, in essence, the egalitarian structure of Valdès' movement with a hierarchy wherein the *barbes* were the 'ordained' pastors of the movement, and the adherents confessed to them and relied on them to administer the sacraments (the sacraments they took at church they deemed irrelevant due to the Catholic Church and clergy's corruption).¹⁸ Poverty, mendicant preaching, and apostolic living were characteristic of the *barbes*. The *barbes* were, to the Poor, the manifestation of what they aspired to be.

As the Waldensians fled into clandestinity, their detractors began to call the sect by the names Vaudois, Waldenses, or Waldensians in reference to their founder (known variously as Valdès, Vaudès, Waldo or Valdesius); the terms were used synonymously.¹⁹ By the late fifteenth or early sixteenth century, the Poor had co-opted the names to refer both to Valdès and to the valleys (*vallenses*) in which they dwelt.²⁰ With the move to the diaspora, the Poor of Lyons was no longer a suitable name for the group, and they began to refer to themselves by new appellations.

In October of 1517, Martin Luther posted his 95 Theses in Wittenberg, and the façade of a united Catholic Europe crumbled. The turmoil and confusion of the early Reformation period allowed the Waldensians to emerge from their clandestine existence into the new atmosphere of poly-religionism. For some Waldensians, this marked the end. The Bohemian Brethren merged with Lutheranism; the Waldensians in France merged with the formal, national branch of French Protestantism; the southern Italian group in Lombardy was

¹⁸ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 17.

¹⁹ See, as an early example, Bernard Gui, *Manuel de l'Inquisiteur* (Paris: Librairie Ancienne Honoré Champion, 1926), 37.

²⁰ The first known use of the term '*vaudes*' by a Waldensian occurred in the thirteenth century poem *La Nobla Leyczon*, but is not found again until the later dates.

annihilated.²¹ The Reformation intrigued the Piedmontese Waldensians, as many of the complaints of the Reformers echoed their grievances. In 1532, the Piedmontese Waldensians convened a synod and elected to modify their religious practices and beliefs to correspond with those of the Reformed Religion, conforming most closely to Calvinist practice. This decision marks a definitive split from the Waldensianism of the Middle Ages: modern historians speak of the ‘death’ of Waldensianism and the emergence of an entirely new religion.²²

There is a great deal that remains unknown about the 1532 synod. What we do know is that the Waldensian leaders chose to create a close association with the Reformed tradition, and to that end inaugurated sweeping doctrinal changes that would result in a transformation of the Waldensian religious experience.²³ They held tightly, however, to their identity as ‘Waldensian’.

The changes in Piedmont were deep, and they took a generation to develop. By the seventeenth century, the Waldensians were fully immersed in the Reformation, but they clung obstinately to their own history and heritage. They proclaimed that they had had an unchanging religious doctrine since their inception, asserted uninterrupted ownership of their home valleys, and, most significantly, continued to call themselves ‘Waldensians’.

When the Waldensians in Piedmont declared allegiance to the Protestant tradition, they placed themselves openly in contempt of Catholicism. In 1559, the Peace of Cateau-Cambrésis restored Piedmont and Savoy to the Duchy of Savoy, then under Duke Charles Emmanuel II, whereupon he promptly attempted to forbid any practice of Reformed Religion

²¹ Pezet, *L’Epopée*, 92-100.

²² See Peter Biller, Gabriel Audisio, Euan Cameron, Giovanni Gonnet, Amedeo Molnar, etc.

²³ For a discussion of the changes initiated by the 1532 synod, see Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and Clarendon Press, 1984), 103-118; 176-228, and Cameron, *Waldenses*, 232-263.

in his lands.²⁴ The Waldensians rebelled, and the resulting conflict, military, political, and ecumenical, brought the two sides to a standstill. The Duke of Savoy finally gave in, agreeing to an unprecedented treaty with the Waldensians, that of Cavour on June 5, 1561. This remarkable treaty was the first in Europe to contravene the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio*, and granted the Waldensians limited rights to exercise their religion as well as allotting them an indemnity for past acts of rebellion.²⁵

The concessions the Waldensians gained remained in place for a century with relatively few troubles. Given the religious tensions of the time, this was remarkable. But these victories came to a gruesome end in 1655 with the events now known as the Piedmontese Easter.²⁶ By this time, the Waldensians had gained some prosperity, and had begun to venture out of their designated valleys. This expansion caused some opposition. In early 1655 the Duke of Savoy commanded that the Waldensians retreat to the valleys his predecessor had given them in the Treaty of Cavour. Many Waldensians left to begin a life in exile in the Swiss cantons, and they called on their Protestant neighbours to come to their aid. On April 24, 1655, the Marquis of Pianezza ordered the army of the Duchy of Savoy to rally a new crusade against the expanding Waldensians.²⁷ Despite the group's acquiescence and affirmations of their submission, reports of Waldensian resistance spurred the oppressors

²⁴ Cameron, *Reformation of the Heretics*, 163.

²⁵ *Ibid.* 'Cuius regio, eius religio' is translated as 'whose realm, his religion', signifying that the religion of the ruler dictates the religion of the ruled. The idea was to create internal religious unity within a state and forestall infighting.

²⁶ Anonymous, *An Account of the late persecution of the Protestants in the vallys of Piemont, by the Duke of Savoy and the French King, in the year 1686* (Oxford: John Crosley at the Theatre, 1688), 4. The Waldensians secured treaties in 1561, 1602, 1603, 1620, 1638, 1649, and 1654.

²⁷ Audisio, *Dissent*, 205.

into action. The Marquis ordered the Savoyard army quartered in the valleys, beginning a full-scale massacre of the Waldensians, despite the rights granted in 1561.²⁸

The horrors visited on the Waldensians immediately became an issue of international importance. The account of the massacre spread across Europe, particularly in England, the Low Countries, and the Swiss Cantons, where Protestantism was strongest, and a wealth of documents in defence of the Waldensians were published. In Geneva, a series of fast-days (the period stretched from May 10-20th) was held in honour of the slaughtered Piedmontese, and collectors were commissioned to go door-to-door begging charity for their 'distressed brethren.'²⁹

In England, Oliver Cromwell launched an international campaign to restore the Waldensians to their rights, and began by questioning if the French had had a hand in the proceedings.³⁰ On May 25, Cromwell's ambassador Samuel Morland arrived to make a formal protest to the court in Turin, and soon thereafter Cardinal Mazarin of France saw it fit to intervene in the interest of avoiding a diplomatic incident. The combined international pressure of England, France, and the Swiss Cantons forced the Duke's hand. After a series of negotiations, and after crushing the Waldensian rebellion, Savoy chose to negotiate a settlement to avoid further resistance. With the French ambassador acting as a mediator, Swiss and English diplomats advised the Waldensians, resulting in the 'Patents of Grace'.³¹

²⁸ For a full record on the massacre of 1655, see A. Armand-Hugon, *Storia dei valdesi vol. ii: Dall'adesione alla Riforma all'Emancipazione (1532-1848)* (Turin: Claudiana, 1974), 73-102 and John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 55.

²⁹ John Pell to Secretary Thurloe, in Robert Vaughan, *The protectorate of Oliver Cromwell and the state of Europe during the early part of the reign of Louis XIV: illustrated in a series of letters between Dr. John Pell, resident ambassador with the Swiss cantons, Sir Samuel Morland, Sir William Lockhart, Mr. Secretary Thurloe, and other distinguished men of the time: now first published from the originals, Volume 1* (London: Henry Colburn, Great Marlborough Street, 1838), 174.

³⁰ Thurloe to Pell, *Ibid.*, 176.

³¹ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 206.

The Patents of Grace (initially issued August 18, 1655) limited the areas which the Waldensians could occupy, but granted them freedom of religion and 'liberty of conscience' in those places. The Patents contained

In successfully negotiating a diplomatic compromise, Cromwell (with Morland's assistance) became further established as the 'champion of Protestantism' in Europe. The English people shared Cromwell's interest in the Waldensians, and an unprecedented wave of documents appeared on the English publication circuit, memorializing the events in a public outcry.

Tensions continued in Piedmont in the late 1650s, as Waldensian leaders continued to struggle against the restrictions imposed on them. Two men, Jahier and Janavel, led the resistance, which resulted in the brokering of a new treaty in 1663.³² This treaty, a more favourable version of the Patents of Grace, restored to the Waldensians the rights they had fought to maintain, beginning eight years earlier. Twenty years of relative peace and stability followed.

By the 1680s, the international situation had evolved, and no longer favoured the Protestant minority. In England, the Catholic James II had taken the throne upon Charles II's death, and Louis XIV's France no longer faced militant Protestant opposition from that country. Indeed, Louis' aggressive Catholic policies began to encroach upon the hinterlands of his kingdom, including the relatively vulnerable Duchy of Savoy. In 1685, Louis XIV, King of France and distant cousin to the Duke of Savoy, rescinded the Edict of Nantes with a new edict, that of Fontainebleau. This edict revoked the policy of religious toleration that had graced France since 1598, and Louis forced his policies into the outskirts of France and into the territories of his young kinsman Victor Amadeus II, then the Duke of Savoy. Amadeus, ostensibly intimidated by the power of the Sun King, began to enforce the policies of

numerous very specific clauses which will not be repeated here, but some examples include: limiting the taxes and tariffs imposed on the Waldensians, forbidding them from purchasing land outside the prescribed areas, forcing Mass to be celebrated throughout the valleys (but not requiring their attendance), and allowing children to remain with their parents until the age of 12. Samuel Morland, *History of the Evangelical Churches of Piedmont* (London: Henry Hills of His Highness's printers for Adoniram Byfield, 1658), 360-370.

³² Audisio, *Dissent*, 205-207.

Fontainebleau in his own lands, much to the dismay of his Reformed subjects.³³ In an edict on January 31, 1686, the Duke of Savoy prohibited the practice of any religion other than Catholicism, and imposed a series of harsh restrictions on the Waldensians and other Reformers to compel them to fall in line.³⁴

The threat to the Waldensians was not empty: the Duke had every intention of enforcing the edict. Worse, the English diplomatic support that had been so influential in the 1655 crisis was nowhere to be found as the Catholic King James II sat on the English throne. The sense of pan-European Protestant brotherhood which had impelled Cromwell and his allies to intervene was lost in the turmoil facing the English at home.

Despite efforts by a Swiss embassy and by the Waldensians, the Duke refused to rescind his edict, and the Waldensians prepared to go into exile. At an assembly on March 12, 1686, the Waldensian Pastor Henri Arnaud gave a fervent speech reminding his people of their history.³⁵ He urged his people to defend their rights and properties, and the dispossessed and distraught people responded favourably. Arnaud dreamed of a short decisive victory, and that it was. It was not, however, a victory for the Waldensians. The small force of Waldensians was devastated and a repeat of the 1655 massacre occurred. The war was over on May 3, 1686.³⁶

The cost to the Waldensians was astronomical. Over 2000 people were slaughtered, and 8500 taken prisoner in makeshift prison camps.³⁷ Most prisoners died from the abysmal conditions during their incarceration, while others were sold to Venetian or French ships. But as soon as the victorious Catholic troops turned their backs, the resilient remaining

³³ Cameron, *Reformation*, 243.

³⁴ See Appendix A for a full transcription of the edict.

³⁵ Audisio, *Dissent*, 208.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

Waldensians emerged from hiding to continue their war of resistance. After several interventions from the Swiss, the Duke granted the remaining prisoners the right to exile in January 1687, and the same to the resistance fighters and their families, and the fighting stopped.

In 1688 the European political situation changed dramatically. The Glorious Revolution in England shifted the European balance of power favourably towards the Protestants, and England once again became a Protestant stronghold. The Edict of Fontainebleau had provoked a surge of resentment against Louis XIV from Protestants and Catholics alike, as Fontainebleau both forbid religious diversity *and* prevented reformers from seeking exile. Almost immediately, an anti-Louis XIV coalition was formed, with William of Orange at its head.³⁸ Following the success of the Glorious Revolution, William III's envoys proposed a plan to the Waldensians to mount an expedition to reclaim their stolen lands, a mission they undertook willingly. *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, the Waldensians' own version of the English revolution, was a continental attempt to reestablish Protestantism in its 'rightful place' in the valleys of Piedmont. On August 16th 1689 over a thousand men, led by Henri Arnaud, began a march from Nyons on Lac Léman (Lake Geneva) to retake their lands.³⁹ After nearly a year of fighting, in June 1690 the Duke of Savoy brokered an alliance with the League of Augsburg, abandoned France, and accepted the Waldensians into favour as a condition of his new alliance. The Duke begrudgingly published an edict of toleration, entitling the Waldensians to practice their religion, and the Waldensians flocked back to Piedmont to resettle their ancestral lands.⁴⁰

³⁸ Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 294.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 211.

The Waldensians and their story became the subject of a number of international publications, a record number of which survive in England. The epidemic of documents produced in England and in Europe after the massacres reveals that the Waldensians did not ‘die’ with the Reformation. Their story continued through the Reformation to resonate in England and echo in Protestant history. This thesis seeks to uncover the intricacies of the English interest in the Waldensians. How did the Waldensian identity play an intrinsic role in legitimizing Protestantism for the English? This thesis will dig deep into the Waldensian identity itself with particular emphasis on the question of continuity. The seventeenth-century Piedmontese Waldensians who are my focus traced their history back to Valdès or even further to apostolic times, and they believed that they professed the same religion across that temporal span.⁴¹ The Waldensians believed they possessed a continuous, unbroken identity despite the hardships and many changes they had undergone; their pure *ancienneté* was the defining factor of their identity.

Most modern historians disagree with this assessment. The current dominant historiographical belief is that Waldensianism ceased to exist when it associated with the Reformation, as the doctrinal changes initiated in 1532 represented such a deep fracture as to result in the death of that religious tradition. What these historians define as Waldensianism, however, is the purely religious dissent of the Poor of Lyons. Parting company with mainstream historiography, this thesis argues that the narrow historiography needs to expand to accommodate theories recognizing that non-theological aspects of identity can also define a religious group and evidence its continuity.

⁴¹ Note that ‘religion’ as used here represents what the Waldensians believed and felt, rather than the idea of religion as we use it today, as that is a nineteenth-century construction.

How can we account for the discrepancy between the historiography and the claims of those who styled themselves Waldensians after the mid-sixteenth century? It is undeniably true that the movement had gone through a process of evolution and change, but was the shift enough to deem it a complete break with the past? The Waldensians were trying to situate themselves within their long history rather than begin anew; certainly they believed they were part of a continuous tradition rather than a broken sect.

Traditional historical research into the Waldensian narrative, having concluded that the group in essence died with the Reformation, dismisses post-Reformation documents as superfluous. This thesis privileges the ideology and writings of seventeenth century Waldensians and Protestants as a gauge of the groups' psychological and socio-cultural beliefs of the time. Waldensian discourse and seventeenth-century Protestant discourse reveal an entirely different perspective of Waldensian history than modern historiography; the rich documentation in England reveals a link to the Protestants there. Accordingly, this thesis will revisit the historiographical conclusion that Waldensianism died in 1532.

The first chapter of this thesis will investigate current historiography and will expand on the debate surrounding the idea of continuity and identity (or rather, the lack of a debate). The ideas of continuity, schism, and evolution are examined from various historiographical perspectives. Discussion of the Waldensian identity (particularly in terms of continuity) is also treated, as it forms a key part of the historiographical debate. This chapter will identify certain gaps in the historiographical record and offer different paths of analysis, focusing specifically on sociological and anthropological perspectives. Most historians discussing the

idea of rupture combine Waldensian discourse with Inquisition discourse.⁴² Their primary focus is determining (non)continuity based on theological and doctrinal (in)stability, often by contributing to the debate over whether the early Waldensians were Catholic or Protestant. This thesis will not enter that debate, but rather will create a new category of analysis. Continuity, in this thesis, is based in discourse, socio-cultural practice, and belief, rather than solely in policies and politics.

Chapter two moves from historiography to focus on the Waldensians themselves, opening up the continuity debate on psychological, social, and cultural levels. The Waldensians characterized their religion as a continuous paradigm, and contrary to the thrust of current historiography, their beliefs should be taken into account when analysing their religion. A sociologically- and anthropologically-based perspective allows us to examine the concept of religious continuity from a fresh viewpoint, reopening questions that modern historians have closed: why did the Waldensians believe they had a continuous identity, and how can their discourse demonstrate that their belief in continuity was more important than the continuity of the strictly theological aspects of religion? This chapter investigates religion as a socio-cultural system rather than a theological one.

The third chapter of this thesis seeks to place the Waldensians, their identity, and the Protestant concern for that identity in a historical context, concentrating particularly on England. The chapter will establish the historical circumstances that led to an interest in the Waldensians as well as why pamphlets and religious literature, the primary means of expressing that interest, occupied such a prominent place in society. It will also examine the historical context of document production in order to understand why the English used the

⁴² Waldensian discourse includes sources produced by the Waldensians, and Inquisition discourse includes sources that have some influence from the Inquisition, i.e. inquisitorial records, Catholic-published treatises about the Waldensians, confessions recorded by non-Waldensians etc.

Waldensians to provide justification for their own religion. Having established that the Waldensian belief in continuity is important quite apart from whether or not they were actually continuous, this chapter will examine why this would have been important to other Protestants.

Chapter four further explores the link between the English and the Waldensians via an examination of literary representations of the Waldensian identity and an investigation of the group's use in propaganda, both religious and political. The Waldensians represented a tangible manifestation of a foundational myth of Protestant legitimacy, and the idea of continuity of religion played a major role in actualizing that belief. In order to reconcile the way the English (and other Protestants) used the Waldensian identity, chapter four examines contemporaneous documents to analyze the ways in which the Waldensians represented themselves, and compares and contrasts those images with the ways Protestants represented the group. This chapter analyses the various aspects of the Waldensian identity used in literary representations of the group, and how those images were used to establish commonality, sympathy, and ultimately political support.

This thesis considers an area of study that has been largely overlooked in the overall investigation of the Waldensians. The wealth of seventeenth-century documents addressing the Waldensians has been ignored by the major Waldensian historians, as they tend to relegate post-Reformation years to an epilogue in their books, having concluded that continuity post-Reformation did not occur. These documents provide an immense amount of information on the evolution of the Waldensians after 1532, and should not be discounted in the historical record.

The primary objective of this thesis is to observe rather than to judge – if what matters in religion is belief, why do we discount what the Waldensians believed? The

concepts of continuity and belief are considered in relation to the social and political developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and this thesis aims to understand the Waldensians as they understood and communicated their own history. Their importance in the broader Protestant agenda forms a key ingredient of their own identity, and it is this identity which we seek to understand.

CHAPTER ONE: HISTORIOGRAPHY AND THE WALDENSISANS AFTER THE REFORMATION

“Polemical Writers of the past and foregoing Ages, have made use of this mistake by a kind of prescription against the Novelty of the Reformation.”¹

The Waldensians emerged from a long period of clandestinity into the new religious atmosphere of the sixteenth century. For modern historians of the Waldensians, the union with the Reformed tradition that occurred at this time represented the death of the movement. The idea of a schism arriving with the Reformation forms a neat ending point for histories of the medieval Waldensians, and undeniably signifies a great change. However, the idea of continuity through the Reformation saturates the histories early modern Waldensians and Protestants wrote about the group, and we find a disconnect between these analyses and modern historiography.² This section will explore the debate (or rather the lack thereof) between continuity and schism with the Reformation.

Death or Continuity?: Evolution, Rupture, and Schism

Prominent Waldensian historians such as Euan Cameron, Gabriel Audisio, Peter Biller, Christine Thouzellier, Amedeo Molnar and Giovanni Gonnet all agree that Waldensianism reached its end with the Reformation. These historians tend to equate Waldensianism with the purely religious dissent of the Poor of Lyons, relegating the socio-cultural aspects of religion to the sidelines.

¹ Pierre Allix, *Some remarks upon the ecclesiastical history of the ancient churches of Piedmont* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1690), 100.

² For Protestants, the idea of the Waldensians as continuous was most significant; while they claimed religious continuity (and this is what modern historians dispute), the actual contents of the religion prior to the Reformation were less important than the idea that they had been ancient and continuous. Instead, they simply transposed the characteristics of the seventeenth century Waldensians onto the group pre-1532.

Gabriel Audisio argues in his trio of seminal works that from a theological view, the changes adopted at the 1532 synod of Chanforan were radical and completely revisionary.³ In ‘*The Waldensian Dissent*’, ‘*Preachers by Night*’, and ‘*Les Vaudois du Luberon*’, Audisio argues that in 1532, the Poor of Lyons gave up their “spiritual essence, their common practices and their understanding of religious intelligence,” and he sees the synod as an astonishing event in terms of dogma, moral principles, doctrine and practice.⁴ Audisio calls the syncretism between the Waldensians and the Reformed Religion an abrupt break with the past; in one fell swoop the Waldensians had renounced theological principles, behavioural patterns and rules that stemmed from Valdès.⁵ The ideas reflected in the documents produced at Chanforan were staunchly Protestant. There was “no midway solution here,” argues Audisio. “It was the inflexible reformist position that was adopted.”⁶

In his work ‘*Les Vaudois*’, Giorgio Tourn reasons that prior to the Reformation the Waldensians did not form a defined church or sect, and had neither a distinct ideology nor a centralized organization.⁷ Thus the acceptance of defined Protestant principles and the organization of the Waldensian community signaled, for Tourn, a mutation so radical “que l’on a pu parler de sa mort: le mouvement spirituel s’y est transformé en confession religieuse, avec des doctrines définies, une organisation.”⁸ What Tourn takes objection to, therefore, is the idea that a group, initially believing itself to be at least spiritually Catholic

³ Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival*, trans. Claire Davison. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999; Gabriel Audisio, *Preachers by Night: The Waldensian Barbes*, Trans. Claire Davison. Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007; Gabriel Audisio, *Les vaudois du Luberon: une minorité en Provence, 1460-1560. Merindol*: Association d’Etudes Vaudoises et Historiques du Luberon, 1984. Chanforan is where the Waldensians allegedly voted to adopt Protestant theology and abandon the tenets of their own movement.

⁴ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 173.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 172.

⁷ Giorgio Tourn, *Les Vaudois* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001), 14.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

despite their rejection both from and of that institution, could later adopt Protestant ideologies all the while claiming a continuity of belief.

Euan Cameron posits that the theological misunderstandings of the Catholic Church helped drive the Waldensians to the Protestants, and *vice versa*. Catholic declarations of Waldensian heretical practices greatly exaggerated their initial dissociation from Catholicism, and reformers later took this as the truth.⁹ Indeed, Cameron says, the adoption of the religion of the reformers constituted “a suppression of old ways by new ones and of old preachers by new ministers.”¹⁰ In this, he indicates that immediately pre-Reformation, the Waldensians were closer to Catholic practice than to Reformed and thus the changes were revolutionary. Cameron argues that over the course of the sixteenth century, the Waldensian movement shed its links with Catholic practice and embraced Protestantism.¹¹

In his book ‘*Medieval Heresy*’, Malcolm Lambert also argues against continuity of the Waldensian religion past the Reformation, citing what he deems to be an about-face in doctrinal practice.¹² The Waldensians originated as a movement of ethical reform, although they did exclude a number of Catholic beliefs and practices,

...such as the doctrine of purgatory, the invocation of Our Lady and the saints, yet retained in their leadership a kind of reformed priesthood, celibate like the Catholics, laying the great stress on certain defined practices. No doubt the emphasis placed on the Scriptures, memorized in the vernacular, opened the way to the reception of new translations and Protestant interpretations, but there was much that was unfamiliar in the Reformed tradition, to be assimilated by their congregations only after prolonged discussion and instruction.¹³

⁹ “Protestant theology did not understand Waldensianism any the better for a close association. Thirteenth-century churchmen had extrapolated the consequences of Waldensian beliefs to make them more radical and coherent than they were in fact; Protestants welcomed such extrapolations, because they seemed to vindicate their own radicalism.” Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press and Clarendon Press, 1984), 257.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 210.

¹² Malcolm Lambert, *Medieval Heresy: Popular Movements from the Gregorian Reform to the Reformation* (Oxford and Cambridge: Blackwell, 1977 and 1992).

¹³ Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 363.

Lambert claims a complete absorption into Protestantism by the later sixteenth century, when the Waldensians abandoned their distinctive traits. Though they proudly retained their name and their claim to a great antiquity, Lambert argues that in most other respects they became indistinguishable from other Calvinist Churches.¹⁴

S.J. Barnett points out the importance of examining what the Reformers themselves thought of the Waldensians. Both Calvin and his successor, Theodore Beza, were not ‘completely satisfied’ with the doctrines of the Waldensians.¹⁵ This might indicate two things: first, that the Waldensians had retained some elements of their previous Catholic-influenced tradition, or second, that after their conversion they preserved enough individuality to demarcate themselves from mainstream Calvinism and to give rise to suspicious sentiments from the Reformist leaders. However, it could also be an indication of distrust arising from the ‘heretical’ history of the Waldensians. Since their doctrines before the Reformation differed from their existing ones, perhaps Calvin felt that they must demonstrate their enduring commitment to Reformed ideals before he could fully trust in the sincerity and permanence of their conversion. Notwithstanding their questionable history and doctrine, both Beza and Calvin considered the Waldensians legitimate forerunners to the Reformation.¹⁶

Current historiographical trends posit that the Waldensians, despite their long history, did not constitute an autonomous religious tradition even in the miscellany of ideas that characterized the Reformation. Indeed, Audisio declares that the Poor of Lyons were “engulfed by the Reformation, whose every thesis they adopted, even those most in

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 366.

¹⁵ SJ Barnett, “Where was Your Church before Luther? Claims for the Antiquity of Protestantism Examined,” *Church History* 68:1 (March 1999), 20.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

contradiction with their deep-rooted practices and beliefs; they aligned themselves unconditionally not only on a theological level but also in terms of ecclesiastical organisation.”¹⁷ The transition into the Reformation, for these historians, represented a divisive and definitive schism from the past. The Waldensians themselves vehemently made the case for the opposite view, claiming *ancienneté*, continuity, and individuality throughout their history.

Most historians tend to treat the differences between Valdès’ original movement and later pre-Reformation incarnations as a necessary evolution rather than a fracture. While expounding on the many differences and great changes undergone between the former and the latter, they do not treat these significant early changes in the same manner as the ‘great gulf’ of the Reformation.

Audisio observes that even prior to the Reformation, the Waldensians had, over the centuries, strayed from the original ideology of Valdès. Due principally to their necessary clandestinity, the believers managed to conceal their convictions to such a degree that eventually a contradiction arose between the principles they proclaimed (derived from their literal reading of the gospel and the Scriptures), and the way they applied these principles to daily life.¹⁸

Many of the principles and practices that had characterized the Poor of Lyons’ dissent were altered radically as the centuries passed. The initial equality given to women in the movement was quickly revoked, foreshadowing the eventual bipartite structure of *barbe-and-believer* that put an end to the original premise of egalitarianism conferred on all members of

¹⁷ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 216.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 164.

the movement.¹⁹ Indeed, the emergence of the special role of the *barbe* could be said to foreshadow the acceptance of Protestant ministers.

The thirteenth century shows a massive change in the social composition of the Waldensians. No longer able to preach publically (or indeed to exist in the public sphere), they retreated from their original urban centres to rural areas to become crofters, herdsman, and farmers. The need to ‘go underground’ dramatically changed the lives of the followers, but also changed the course of the movement’s evolution. As Audisio demonstrates, their world was turned upside down with their retreat from public religious life.

Their primary mission, the very reason for which they existed, was to announce the Word of Christ. This obviously implied the duty to preach in public. Suddenly, they were forced into hiding, labelled and hunted down as heretics; their Brothers were designated as partners in crime, their books and sermons dismissed as erroneous. The initial goal of converting others to evangelical poverty could henceforth be maintained only in an indirect, moderate way since fear of being denounced compelled them to be silent. Public gatherings in churches and on public squares came to an end. A new era began, characterised by hasty meetings at dusk, limited circles of friends gathering by night around the hearth, veiled allusions, covert glances and signs known only to themselves. The only way to meet the Brothers was to be introduced by a friend.... In other words, these missionaries came gradually to give up converting new followers; their duties gradually altered.²⁰

If, as Audisio implies, the very fabric of the movement was changed, was there really a fracture with the Reformation, or had it already occurred centuries earlier? Indeed, three centuries after Valdès’ epiphany, of the three pillars of faith, only the third pillar, Scripture as truth, remained unchanged; preaching and poverty had been dramatically altered in both theory and practice. The necessities of clandestinity worked against itinerant preaching and mendicant poverty, leaving the movement radically different from its origins.²¹

¹⁹ Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 170.

²⁰ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 35-36.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 104.

Unlike Audisio's somewhat paradoxical claims that Waldensianism evolved with clandestinity but did not change enough to constitute a break, Giovanni Gonnet and Amedeo Molnar seem to give credence to the theory of an unchanging Waldensianism. "On a l'impression que, pour l'essentiel, l'organisation vaudoise n'a pas changé depuis trois siècles, adaptée qu'elle était aux besoins de clandestinité sous un régime extérieur subi à contre coeur."²² They also argue for less of an evolution of the religious movement itself, claiming unchanging continuity from Valdès' time until the Reformation, at least for the most truly faithful: "Malgré les vexations et les tribulations qu'elle doit subir, la vraie *ecclesia Dei* minoritaire et clandestine ne disparaît jamais entièrement au cours des siècles."²³ Interestingly, the two historians apply the term '*Ecclesia Dei*', meaning Church of God, which parallels the claims the Waldensians themselves later made of being the 'True Church', hidden from the mainstream in order to safeguard the purity of Christianity as the Catholic Church led the rest of the world astray.

Because of the need to remain hidden, Waldensianism became a religion passed on by blood rather than by conversion. This is a marked difference from the outspoken proselytizing of the original movement, and indeed from later Protestant preaching. The descent into clandestinity marked, for the Waldensians, an enormous change from their former religious existence. As Audisio argues, somewhat in opposition to his earlier suggestion of religious evolution, "In practical terms, [clandestinity] led to a form of introversion, segregation, or sclerosis even, in stark contrast with the dynamic spontaneity of the original impetus."²⁴ Also contradicting the earlier observation that the '*ecclesia Dei*' had

²² Amedeo Molnar and Giovanni Gonnet, *Les Vaudois au Moyen Age* (Torino: Claudiana, 1974), 299.

²³ Molnar and Gonnet, *Vaudois*, 209.

²⁴ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 68.

not changed for 300 years, Amedeo Molnar went so far as to argue that “historically speaking, the movement was dying by 1400.”²⁵

The proud stance of the Poor of Lyons as renewers of the Church’s vitality was in flux throughout this period. Instead of proudly proclaiming their twelfth century origins, the later medieval Poor invented a back story to give their movement credibility. While this seems a logical reaction in the face of heavy-handed criticism, it intrinsically altered the beliefs of the movement. As Lambert argues, the Waldensians met the question, ‘Where were you before Valdès?’ by “evolving a version of Church history which made them from the outset the true Church and the papal Church a false or malign one from the time of the Donation of Constantine, incidentally overturning the truth about Valdes – that he was a layman who claimed the right to preach - by putting him into priest’s orders.”²⁶ This falsification of origins was not an invention of the Reformation era, but was a reactive defence created long before the sixteenth century.²⁷

Also contributing to the evolution debate, Susanna K. Treesh argues that the resolutely pacifist stance of the early Waldensians had altered so greatly that they led an armed resistance against anti-heretical crusaders in the Dauphiné in 1487-88.²⁸ Treesh has investigated the Waldensian identity in terms of the use of violence to achieve political ends, and argues that their non-violent, even pacifist identity increasingly became unrealistic, and that they eventually sanctioned the use of violence for survival.²⁹

²⁵ Amedeo Molnar ‘Les Vaudois en Bohème avant la revolution Hussite,’ *Bollettino della Societa di Studi Valdesi* 116 (1964): 3-17. In Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 60.

²⁶ Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 157.

²⁷ As early as the thirteenth century *La Nobla Leyczon*, the Poor were claiming that their movement stretched back to the days of Constantine. The claim of apostolic origins came slightly later as an extension of this. The Waldensians had remained part of the Church until the Donation of Constantine, but their true origins came with the Church and the Apostles, only differentiating later when the Church gave in to corruption.

²⁸ Susanna K. Treesh, “The Waldensian Recourse to Violence,” *Church History* 55:3 (September 1986): 297.

²⁹ Treesh, “Recourse to Violence,” 301.

Despite this far from exhaustive catalogue of differences between the early and late medieval Waldensians, historians do not deem there to be a break between the two. The Reformation fracture was deeper and more immediate, argues Audisio, making the case against continuity based mainly in a break with tradition: “it is more fitting to speak of a break with the past rather than an evolution, particularly since the changes were so great, and the matters being renounced of such consequence.”³⁰ Rather than the slow evolution of the four centuries after Valdès, Audisio emphasizes that this break was abrupt.

Audisio, despite his vehement argument against religious continuity through the Reformation, concedes that there might be some measure of continuity. The three foundational pillars of reformist theology are justification by faith alone (*sola fide*), by Scripture alone (*sola Scriptura*), and the priesthood of all believers. The last two points “were an exact echo of Vaudès’s stand four centuries before. They were also fully in keeping with the tradition of Waldensian thought and practices.”³¹

Lambert agrees. Despite his insistence that the Reformation constituted a clean break with the past, he does agree that many of the key features of Waldensianism were consistent with those of the Reformation: “Much of the core of Waldensian belief lay in a cutting away of what were seen to be the excrescences of orthodox belief in purgatory, in images, in pilgrimages; in an insistence on good living; and in the literal observance of the texts of Scripture.”³² Though theory and practice were not identical, the idea of removing the ‘dissolute excesses’ of Catholicism and concentrating on the message of Jesus were central both to Waldensians prior to the Reformation and to reformers.

³⁰ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 187.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 162.

³² Lambert, *Medieval Heresy*, 152.

Cameron's central thesis contends that the Vaudois had undergone centuries of evolution, but the changes of the Reformation were so profound as to signify a symbolic death of the Waldensian movement. He does allow for continuity in the form of community structures, ideas, and beliefs, though not necessarily practices. He admits that though the end of the Middle Ages and the advent of the Reformation do represent the 'end' of Waldensianism as a heresy, "if one considers popular religion to consist as much in people as in Church structures, creeds and procedures, then some at least of the Waldensian peoples did continue, albeit in a very different form."³³

Cameron reiterates the idea that perhaps the continuity of Waldensianism hinged more on socio-cultural and psychological elements than on religious practice itself:

Just as the 'lay' elements in heretical organization turned out to be more crucial to its fate than its 'spiritual' personnel, so perhaps the Waldenses would ultimately have been much more conspicuous by those traits which did not actually involve religious acts. Their tendency to endogamy, their unwillingness to allow themselves the usual profanities of speech, their living apart from their neighbours and using their own signs and emblems, would have been a far more regular part of Waldensian life and conduct than a heretical confession made less often than once every two years. Ultimately, perhaps, the Vaudois were that most striking of phenomena: a rural, popular, marginal elite with a highly developed self-consciousness and communal pride.³⁴

Cameron's observations lend support to the notion that these Waldensians continued to maintain their distinctive communal identity embodied in a non-Catholic religious practice; subtle continuities transpired at the level of local community. While Cameron does acquiesce to the possibility of socio-cultural continuity, he firmly separates that from the idea of religious continuity, discounting the notion of a religion which exists in the socio-cultural sphere. Cameron is firm in his view that the Waldensians 'died out' with the Reformation, but he is exceptional in undertaking careful reconsideration of the continuity claims. He

³³ Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 210.

³⁴ Cameron, *Reformation*, 125-6

argues that since heresy was defined against Catholicism, with the Reformation that sounding board was altered out of recognition. By the sixteenth century, the conditions in which popular heresy had been created had vanished.³⁵

Molnar and Gonnet contend that perhaps it was the sociological elements that created a divide between the Church and the Poor of Lyons in the first place. Poverty, not theology, created the illusion of separation. “C’est bien la pauvreté qui faisait apparaître les Vaudois comme dégagés des cadres de l’Eglise établie et à la fois comme suspects d’une solidarité ou même d’une complicité déconcertante, d’un engagement libérateur.”³⁶ This tradition of disengagement along socio-cultural lines may signify the beginning of a movement based in those elements just as much as in theological ones.

Valdo Vinay takes the view that perhaps the heresy was initially based less in theology than historiography gives it credit for. Would then the argument of socio-cultural continuity of the movement into the Reformation not carry more weight? Perhaps, he says, “the medieval Waldensian protest, based on the Sermon on the Mount and on other fundamental sayings of the Gospel had a character more moral, social, and disciplinary than theological in the exact sense of the term.”³⁷

Peter Biller is another historian who carefully reconsiders the Waldensian claims of continuity. He notes that modern historiography has undoubtedly tipped the scales towards ideas of disunity and discontinuity, and that further study should be undertaken on the counter-case. Biller talks about the “memories of a Waldensian version of history,” and says

³⁵ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 209.

³⁶ Molnar and Gonnet, *Vaudois*, 173.

³⁷ Valdo Vinay, *Le Confessioni di fede dei Valdesi riformati* (Torino, 1975), 11. Trans. Cameron, *Reformation*, 70.

that this story united people across an astounding scope of time and space.³⁸ Biller, despite his reluctance to admit that the Waldensians were indeed a continuous, unified group, questions his own methods in dealing with the idea of the Waldensians existing as a coherent movement even before the Reformation. Part of his argument that speaks of discontinuity rests on the temporal and geographical diaspora of the Waldensians that acted as a preventative measure to cohesiveness. Because of our virtual inability to access the Waldensians prior to the Reformation, we cannot know precisely what their beliefs and practices were. Continuity thus becomes a more distinct possibility. “Should we,” Biller asks, “when dealing with an underground group, lean *further* towards allowing connections about which we shall never have direct evidence?”³⁹

The historians examined above all concur that Waldensianism died with the Reformation. Many have acknowledged a degree of continuity on a more socio-cultural basis, but have denied the importance of this in a religious sense. The Waldensians, however, believed in a continuous religious tradition despite all evidence to the contrary. We must, then, delve deeper into the idea of these sociological factors as important to religious continuity to discover what allowed for this belief, and whether we can validate the claims of the post-Reformation Waldensians. The distinct identity professed by seventeenth century Waldensians demonstrates their conviction in an ancient past, but modern historians tend to be dismissive of the significance of this deeply held belief.

³⁸ Peter Biller, *The Waldenses: Between a Religious Order and a Church* (Burlington, Vermont and Aldershot, Great Britain: Ashgate, 2001), 14.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 15.

Nomenclature, Terminology, and the Waldensian Identity in the Continuity Debate

Modern historiography presents the Waldensians as a homogenous Protestant group inseparable from the countless other reformers in the Piedmont-Dauphiné-Alpine area, generally only taking into account the strictly theological aspects of their existence. What these historians overlook or downplay is the importance of a socio-cultural identity that coexists – and overlaps – with religious identity. The non-theological identity of the Waldensians has been neglected, both in the study of their initial identity as the Poor of Lyons and in the study of their later incarnation as Protestants, particularly in the examination of how seventeenth-century Waldensians identified the relationship between themselves and their ancestors. The general consensus is that the Waldensians, due to their lack of theological continuity, were not distinct from their post-Reformation coreligionists, despite their fervent exhortations, and this thesis will seek to revisit that assertion. If the Waldensians were not, in fact, distinct from other Protestants, why were they so deeply concerned with maintaining the ‘illusion’ of division? I posit that the separate Waldensian identity rested on the idea of continuity and *ancienneté*. If, as most historians argue, there was no continuity, then a distinct identity would be lacking as well. But the Waldensians were determined to preserve and celebrate their individuality, and this identity of individuality became a form of religious continuity in itself.

Tourn argues that the Waldensian identity was constructed not by the movement itself, but by outsiders, and that this has allowed for the idea of continuity despite actual differences that occurred across time and space.⁴⁰ How outsiders portrayed the Waldensians indeed helped shape their identity both pre- and post-Reformation, but does this make that

⁴⁰ Tourn, *Les Vaudois, passim*.

identity any less valid? If the Waldensians were identified continuously as a unique religious entity, and adopted that view, would that not become in and of itself a defining feature of their identity?

For Biller, the identity question is more about the plurality of medieval Waldensianisms. In his book *The Waldenses*,⁴¹ Biller asks readers to consider “how far should one think of medieval phenomena that have been grouped together and called ‘Waldensian,’ as having the identity, continuity and cohesion that warrants the singular noun *Valdisimo*?”⁴¹ Biller’s argument stems mainly from the disunity that characterised the diaspora of the Poor of Lyons. However, what troubles him more than the diversity of the Waldensians is the belief of the Piedmontese Waldensians in their continuity and universality. For Biller, it is primarily the ideas of change and growth that pose a dilemma, because the Waldensians themselves did not see an evolution.⁴² Aside from the thoughtful consideration given by these few authors, the Waldensian identity post-Reformation seems to be a topic of little interest to most historians. Why have historians undervalued and even ignored the Protestant treatment of the Waldensian identity in terms of continuity and individuality? Considering the historical context of the seventeenth century, identity became crucially important to Waldensian survival and it is quite surprising that such study has not been undertaken in greater detail.

The seventeenth century Waldensian identity was also strongly tied to their name. Strictly speaking, their theology conformed to other Reformed doctrines, but they clung obstinately to their distinct identity, vested in their name as a demarcation. But when did this name become important? Does the seventeenth century title ‘Waldensian’ really provide a

⁴¹ Biller, *The Waldenses*, x.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 13.

link back to the medieval originators? The history and historiography of the group's designations reveal some interesting dilemmas.

Several modern authors take issue with the early use of the term 'Waldensian' or 'Vaudois' to describe the group originally known as the Poor of Lyons. The names were initially derogatory terms used by the group's many detractors as a malicious reference to the twelfth-century founder variously known as Waldo, Valdès, or Vaudès.⁴³ Seeking to prey upon the humble origins of the group, these critics treated Valdès with an ironic reverence that his followers had never done. However, the group did not refer to itself by the term Waldensian until later.⁴⁴ They called themselves the Poor of Lyons, Brothers, *Pauperes Christi* (Poor of Christ), or *Pauperes Dei* (Poor of God).⁴⁵ It was only later that 'Waldensian' ceased to be a pejorative term when the movement adopted it proudly. The timing on this, however, is unclear. Was it the Reformation that removed the stigma, or did the Waldensians reclaim the idiom on their own terms? Audisio claims that the term 'Waldensian' was proudly co-opted only *after* it had lost its heretical meaning or intrinsic religious connotation after the Reformation.⁴⁶ Cameron claims that the Bohemian Brethren began to use the term much earlier, around the end of the fifteenth century, before the Reformation itself.⁴⁷ The name 'Waldensian' is also projected *ex post facto*, giving that identity a falsified antiquity.

It is not until after the Reformation that we can find concrete evidence of the Waldensians using the term to refer to themselves; however sources produced by the group before the Reformation are rare and the paucity of evidence may not reflect an actual historical reality. In any case, beginning in the early sixteenth century at the very latest, the

⁴³ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 8.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 46.

⁴⁵ Gabriel Audisio, *Preachers by Night: The Waldensian Barbes*, trans. Claire Davison (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill, 2007), 33.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 221.

⁴⁷ Cameron, *Reformation*, 187.

Waldensians co-opted the term into mainstream usage and shed the pejorative meaning. This is similar to the term ‘Puritan’ that we now ascribe to Cromwell and his followers: initially the word had a negative connotation. Interestingly, the Oxford English Dictionary cites the origin of the term Waldenses or Vaudois as 1537 (with one early reference ca. 1449).⁴⁸ This coincides with the Waldensians’ emergence from clandestinity into the Protestant world. This dating may be compatible with the first known use of the term in the English language, but it is certainly not the first use of the term in the historical record. The infamous Inquisitor Bernard Gui catalogued the punishments he meted out to various heretics and infidels in his *Livre de Sentences* from 1308 to 1323, and the Latin terms ‘*Valdenses*’ ‘*Valdensibus*’ and ‘*Valdensium*’ make frequent appearances, and are used interchangeably with the term ‘*Pauperes de Lugduno*’ which translates to ‘Poor of Lyons’.⁴⁹ Martin Luther wrote to the Duke of Savoy in 1523, asking him to protect the Waldensians in Piedmont, as they were his loyal subjects.⁵⁰ Despite the obviously favourable light in which Luther used the word, Audisio claims that the term only ceased to be pejorative forty or fifty years later.⁵¹ In any case, by the time the term came into widespread use by European Protestants, the Waldensians were also using the word to describe themselves.

The Waldensians do not refer to themselves as Protestants, but maintain the division between themselves and their coreligionists. Indeed, none of the Waldensian treatises use the word ‘Protestant’ in the text.⁵² In addition to the many names the Waldensians used for

⁴⁸ ‘Waldenses’ and ‘Vaudois’. *Oxford English Dictionary Online*, Oxford University Press, 2010.

⁴⁹ Bernard Gui, *Le Livre des Sentences vols I & II*, trans. Annette Pales-Gobillard (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002), *passim*.

⁵⁰ In Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 163.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 201.

⁵² There is one notable exception: the anonymous document ‘The Declaration and Manifesto of the Protestants of the Vallies of Piemont’ uses the word in its title; however, it is mentioned nowhere else in the document, which has a secondary title on the first page. It is thus entirely possible that the translator, printer, or publisher himself wrote and attached the title page. Otherwise, the term does not appear in Waldensian literature.

themselves, sixteenth century Swiss Calvinists added ‘reformed’ to the list, but did not seem to use ‘Protestant’ in reference to the group. The English, however, used the term rampantly, projecting an identity on the Waldensians: “Protestant historians...understood and presented the history of the Poor of Lyons as that of a forerunner of the Reformation. To their minds, the Waldensians were Protestants before the term itself had been coined.”⁵³ In seventeenth century documents, the most common terms used in reference to the group are ‘Waldensian’ or ‘Vaudois’, ‘Protestant’, and ‘Reformer’ or ‘of the Reformed Religion’. There are occasional uses of misnomers, such as ‘Albigeois’ or ‘Wycliffite’ that link the Waldensians to other early groups of non-Catholic Christians. Catholic sources continued to use the term ‘heretic’ in reference to the Waldensians well past the seventeenth century, and they also used the pejorative ‘pretended reformed religion’ in reference to the group. The Waldensians are also commonly referred to by such epithets as ‘Ancient Professors of Pure Christianity’ or ‘Ancient Protestants of the Vallies’. Given the sparse record of Waldensian writing pre-Reformation, the change in nomenclature over time does not in itself present strong evidence informing the discussion of rupture versus continuity. Rather, the apparent shift from the pejorative use of the term ‘Waldensian’ to its inclusion in the mainstream vernacular signifies a strong identification with the past, if not any conclusively direct ties.

Waldensians and Protestants: Literature, Propaganda, and Foreign Relations

Another lacuna in the historiographical record is a discussion of the use of the Waldensians in propagandistic literature. The documents produced surrounding the massacres of the Piedmontese Waldensians in 1655, 1686, and 1689 demonstrate strikingly

⁵³ *Ibid.*

similar uses of the Waldensians' supposedly ancient and continuous religious identity as propaganda, yet virtually none of the chief Waldensian historians has chosen to examine these documents. This is due, one would presume, to the fact that these historians believe the history of the Waldensians to have ended in the sixteenth century, and therefore their exploits *post factum* are not really relevant to the study of 'true Waldensianism'. S.J. Barnett notes that the exploration of documents citing the Waldensians as spiritual forebearers of Protestantism has been neglected, and that further study should certainly be undertaken.⁵⁴

These documents, written primarily by English sympathisers of the Waldensians, occupy an insignificant space in the broader historiography of English pamphlet culture and studies on English foreign relations. From the broadest to the most specialized studies of pamphlet culture and literature, neither religious nor propagandist mention is made of the Waldensian pamphlets, which as this thesis posits, played an important historical function in detailing the English public's interest in the idea of Protestant solidarity as well as influencing political dealings on the continent (and thus impacting the Waldensians).⁵⁵ One massive study, although not in itself a study of pamphlet culture or literature, concentrates on the place the Waldensians held in Protestant propagandist literature as a means of justifying religious intolerance of Catholics by Protestants. John Marshall's detailed book, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture*, examines English and Continental Protestants'

⁵⁴ Barnett, "Where was your Church?," 41.

⁵⁵ See, for example, Green, I.M., *Print and Protestantism in early modern England*. Oxford and Toronto: Oxford University Press, 2000; Peacey, Jason. *Politicians and Pamphleteers*. Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004; Wheale, Nigel. *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain*. London and New York: Routledge, 1999; Loewenstein, David, and Marshall, John, eds. *Heresy, Literature and Politics in Early Modern English Culture*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Lander, Jesse M. *Inventing Polemic: Religion, Print, and Literary Culture in Early Modern England*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006; Ellenzeig, Sarah. *The Fringes of Belief: English Literature, Ancient Heresy, and the Politics of Freethinking, 1660-1760*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2008; Adams, David, and Armstrong, Adrian, Eds. *Print and Power in France and England, 1500-1800*. Aldershot, Great Britain: Ashgate, 2006; Barbour, Reid. *Literature and Religious Culture in Seventeenth-Century England*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002; and Corns, Thomas N. *A History of Seventeenth-Century English Literature*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2007.

use of the Waldensians (particularly concentrating on the massacre of 1686) as a tool of political propaganda in justifying resistance to Catholic oppression, including legitimizing the Glorious Revolution as a preemptive strike against the dangers posed by a Catholic ruling a Protestant population. Marshall is thorough in his examination of the Waldensians' use as a figurehead for rebellion, but he does not address the more varied aspects of the Waldensian identity and how or why the ideas of continuity and *ancienneté* would have been important to Protestants using the Waldensians in their political propaganda.⁵⁶

A. Cameron Airhart concentrates his study of the Waldensians on one piece in particular, Samuel Morland's 1658 history of the group. Airhart analyses Morland's scientific method of research, noting how "for Morland the scientific method rested on empirical data, on 'facts' collected and assembled as evidence, and when Morland wrote about Waldensian history he collected more documentary evidence in support of his arguments than had any preceding historian."⁵⁷ Airhart's view of Morland's influence in affecting the popular response to the 1655 massacre seems overstated, since Morland's history was not published until 1658, while Airhart analyses the response more or less immediately following the massacre. More appropriate is his examination of the Waldensians' (and other medieval heresies') appearances in millenarian literature as a familiarizing agent: the Waldensians were known to the English people as important figures well before they became internationally important.

Marina Benedetti's article *I Valdesi 'senza Riforma.'* *Appunti sui Valdesi alpini del tardo medioevo* discusses the burgeoning interest the 1980s and 1990s held for investigating the Waldensians up until the Reformation, and the divisive line that event holds in the

⁵⁶ Marshall, *Toleration*, *passim*.

⁵⁷ A. Cameron Airhart, 'Medieval Heretics and Cromwell's Protectorate', in *Medievalism in England: Studies in Medievalism IV*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 61.

historiography of the movement.⁵⁸ Benedetti's significant point is the imbalance of analysis between using the Reformation as a strict division, and seeing it as another step in the continuum of history. She notes that while pre-Reformation Waldensian texts – including didactic-religious manuscripts of the *barbes* – have been edited and analyzed, there is a deficiency in post-Reformation document analysis.⁵⁹ Benedetti observes that this paucity needs to be remedied, and points to such documents as Peter Allix's *Some Remarks upon the Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont* as a suitable starting point for this endeavour.⁶⁰ This document plays an important role in promoting the Waldensian/Protestant identity as well as indicating the English interest in the group, and thus figures heavily in this thesis.

The multitude of seventeenth century documents expresses how important the Waldensian belief in continuity – and the associated identity as ancient proto-Protestants – was to Protestants. Their use of the Waldensians as justification for reform and for political actions as well as for the Waldensians' own sake in fighting for their rights showcases a deep conviction that modern writers have all but dismissed.

The Waldensian identity as deep-rooted and continuous Protestants became important to Reformers searching for ancient justification, but the Waldensians also took on importance in the seventeenth century in issues of international political relevance. Much like their brief appearances in literature discussing their importance to Protestants, the Waldensians make infrequent appearances in broader histories. Their repeated mention in histories of Oliver Cromwell provides fodder for discussion, but this has not been explored to any significant

⁵⁸ Marina Benedetti, "I Valdesi "senza Riforma". Appunti sui Valdesi alpini del tardo medioevo," in *Heresis: Numero Thematique, Heretiques ou Dissidents? Reflexions sur l'Identite de l'Herésie au Moyen Age* 36-37 (2002), 15-27. 'The Waldensians "without reform." Notes on the Alpine Waldenses of the late Middle Ages'.

⁵⁹ Benedetti, 'I Valdesi,' 17.

⁶⁰ Pierre Allix, *Some Remarks upon the Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1690). In Benedetti, 'I Valdesi,' 27.

extent. Cromwell took a particular interest in their plight, but this interest is often relegated to a position as an interesting side note or a brief note in the discussion of Anglo-French relations at the time.

Several historians touch on the relationship between Cromwell, England, and the Waldensians, but stay away from delving deeply into the subject. The complex relationship between Cromwell's England as 'Protestant Champion' and the Waldensians as Protestants in need of aid has merited mention, but not a full historical study. G.M.D Howat outlines the Waldensians' importance in delaying an Anglo-French treaty, but does not bestow on them any significance as Protestants.⁶¹ Bernard Cottret is slightly more elucidating, at least noting the importance the 1655 massacre held in terms of emotion in 'l'ensemble du monde protestant.' He refers to the Waldensians as 'ces frères en la foi' and gives a brief history to put the massacre in perspective. Cottret contextualizes Cromwell's intervention as an anti-Catholic venture as well as a compassionate one in service of Protestantism.⁶²

Timothy Venning is one of the few historians of foreign policy to give the Waldensians a modicum of attention, analysing the 1655 massacre as a significant episode in Anglo-French negotiations, and designating a whole chapter of his book on Cromwellian foreign policy to the events. Indeed, he calls the massacre "the most shocking evidence for decades of French-inspired persecution" and posits that had the massacre occurred a month before it did, results for the later Anglo-French treaty "might have been catastrophic."⁶³ Venning notes the disproportional outcry the massacre received for the size and scale of the actual events; this he attributes to the incident both "stimulating a sense of national unity and

⁶¹ G.M.D. Howat, *Stuart and Cromwellian Foreign Policy* (London: A & C Black, 1974), 84.

⁶² Bernard Cottret, *Cromwell* (Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1992), 401. 'The collective Protestant world' and 'Brothers in faith'.

⁶³ Timothy Venning, *Cromwellian Foreign Policy* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 69.

indignation against the regime's supposed arch-enemies, the potential backers of Charles Stuart," and producing a sense of solidarity with the Waldensians.⁶⁴

More interestingly, most histories of foreign policy and the Glorious Revolution hardly make mention at all of the concurrent events in Piedmont. There are a number of separate histories discussing *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, but these are primarily undertaken by Waldensian historians rather than by historians interested in the relationship between England and Piedmont, and are often simply accounts of the Waldensians' trek and reclamation of the valleys, with some brief discussion of the political relations that enabled their survival. One would expect L.A. Robertson's 1929 article "The Relations of William III with the Swiss Protestants, 1689-1697" to provide at least some mention of William's part in *La Glorieuse Rentrée*.⁶⁵ The article does not concentrate on the Waldensians' role in the political machinations, instead focusing on the pivotal role Switzerland played in the strategic plans of the anti-French League of Augsburg. It makes no mention of the Waldensians' 1689 journey, but, oddly enough, does discuss the role of the 1655 massacre in Anglo-Swiss relations.

John Marshall's previously mentioned work does link the Glorious Revolution with *La Glorieuse Rentrée*; Marshall concentrates on propagandists using the massacres of the Waldensians as justification for overthrowing or resisting Catholic oppression.⁶⁶ Christopher Storrs' work on the complicated alliances and treaties surrounding Savoy's entrance into the Grand Alliance is another notable exception. Storrs surveys and analyses – with great insight – the importance of the Waldensians as a bargaining chip in William III's negotiations with

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

⁶⁵ L.A. Robertson, "The Relations of William III with the Swiss Protestants, 1689-1697," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12:4 (1929): 137-162.

⁶⁶ Marshall, *Toleration*, *passim*.

Victor Amadeus II upon his declaration for the Grand Alliance.⁶⁷ Storrs studies the monetary concessions and transactions that formed the basis of many alliance negotiations, and notes the Waldensians' instrumental presence in determining these figures. Indeed, Storrs discusses the little-known Lindau project, a Grand Alliance project designed to both aid the returning Waldensians and to provide a forum for exploiting France's weak south-eastern frontier via the Dauphiné.⁶⁸ Storrs is notable for his exceptional concentration on the importance of the Waldensians in these larger political dealings. Otherwise, in surveys of English matters, mention of William's assistance to the Piedmontese Waldensians is scarce.

Because the Waldensians were so important in the political sphere of the seventeenth century, it is surprising that the documents produced discussing their history and trials and tribulations do not figure more heavily into the historiographical record. This thesis will investigate the seventeenth century documents to provide a new interpretation of the relationship between Protestants and Waldensians, as well as using the documents to study the ideas of *ancienneté* and continuity as understood by those groups.

Anthropology, Sociology, and Privileging the Socio-Cultural

Waldensian discourse demonstrates one side of the continuity argument, and modern historiography the other. However, we need to consider a third element. Historians have considered continuity primarily on the level of theology, but we know that religious identity is not composed simply of doctrine. It encompasses a far wider range of beliefs, from faith to myth to superstition to family values to political ideology. Narrowing down the idea of the continuity of religious identity to doctrine is far too simplistic to explain continuity through

⁶⁷ Christopher Storrs, "Machiavelli Dethroned: Victor Amadeus II and the Making of the Anglo-Savoyard Alliance of 1690," *European History Quarterly* 22:3 (1992): 347-381.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 350.

an upheaval as great as the Reformation. Religious identity is more than doctrine, and we need a broader examination: a sociological and anthropological analysis of continuity as identity.

Historian Marina Benedetti makes the suggestion for examining the Waldensians with the idea of a ‘shared identity’ to explain the formula for continuity.⁶⁹ Modern sociological and anthropological thought adds a theoretical framework from which my analysis of the Waldensian conception of religious identity stems. These disciplines see religion as a broader category than theology, and have stressed the importance of factors other than doctrine in creating a unified religious movement. This frames the Waldensians’ belief in continuity in a manner that supports an alternative to the traditional historical analytical approach.

The Waldensians, in sustaining a belief in their continuity, created a supra-theological religious community. Countless anthropological and sociological studies have pointed to the importance of religion in uniting a society, but these studies do not necessarily concentrate on theological matters. In fact, they nearly always deal more with faith, practice and ritual, and myth. Each of these dimensions of religion is given an equal – if not superior – place to theology in the foundations of religion, and it is in this way that Waldensian history can be seen to conform to the idea of continuity.⁷⁰

Faith as an idea is dealt with separately from the exact contents of that faith. As Malcolm Ruel, a social anthropologist, posits, “in Christianity to be a believer is to acknowledge an allegiance and to declare an identity: the person does not always have to be

⁶⁹ Benedetti, ‘I Valdesi,’ 25.

⁷⁰ See, for example, Clifford Geertz, ‘Religion as a Cultural System,’ in Michael Lambek, *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion* (Malden and Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 57-75.

clear about the full content of his belief.”⁷¹ The Waldensians fulfill these criteria precisely: they believed in their adherence to Waldensianism, clearly declared their identity as the inheritors of an ancient and unchanging tradition, and were not clear about the content of their beliefs: they did not clearly elucidate the imprecise circumstances surrounding the veracity of their claims and beliefs. As socio-religious anthropologist Fiona Bowie notes, “Religion... lies in the realm of faith rather than fact and is therefore by definition unverifiable.”⁷²

A.R. Radcliffe-Brown concludes that “the social function of a religion is independent of its truth or falsity,” and so we can argue that the Waldensian identity was predicated on a continuance of belief, regardless of the truth or falsity of that continuity.⁷³ Indeed, as the famed sociologist Emile Durkheim concluded, religion is “an eminently social thing,” and it serves the purpose of creating a collective mentality for a community: “Religious representations are collective representations that express collective realities; rites are ways of acting that are born only in the midst of assembled groups and whose purpose is to evoke, maintain, or re-create certain mental states of those groups.”⁷⁴

Myth holds a unique place in the religious process, both creating and sustaining belief, and being created by belief. In religion, myth is a multifunctional tool. It can construct a foundational narrative from which all belief stems; it can explain phenomena; create illusions; validate power relationships; make the social order appear natural and pre-

⁷¹ Malcolm Ruel, “Christians as Believers,” in *Anthropology of Religion: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume III*, ed. Phillips Stevens, Jr. (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 279.

⁷² Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 6.

⁷³ A.R. Radcliffe-Brown, “Religion and Society,” in *Anthropology of Religion: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume I*, ed. Phillips Stevens, Jr. (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 182.

⁷⁴ Emile Durkheim, “The Elementary Forms of Religious Life,” in Michael Lambek, *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion, Second Edition* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2002), 38.

existent.⁷⁵ Myth was assumed to be real by those who embraced the faith, and thus was a powerful tool for religions. Myth was certainly used to construct the Waldensian identity.⁷⁶ The Waldensian experience post-Reformation (and indeed pre-Reformation) was based in a history constructed from mythologized accounts of the past, from the legend of apostolic origin, to the story that they possessed True Christianity, all converging in the belief in a continuous and unruptured profession of religion. It is this last myth that primarily concerns us, for this is the basis of the Waldensian identity with which history takes issue. The truth of the myth should not be the overriding concern for historians, since it was secondary to the people we are examining. The constancy of faith and the construction of the continuity myth are the most important factors in the Waldensian identity and indeed for Protestant conceptions of the movement. Durkheim nicely encapsulated why myth matters more than truth in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* when he ultimately concluded that belief is more pivotal than reason in the determination of human affairs.⁷⁷

The continuity of religion the Waldensians professed is removed from the historian's traditional view of religion; it becomes a sociological trend. Objectively, we see that religious continuity, strictly speaking, is a fallacy. But religion is not an objective concept; it is a subjective experience.⁷⁸ Bowie stresses religion's ambiguity. For her, religion is defined by its 'non-empirical nature.'⁷⁹ For Ninian Smart, a pioneer of secular religious studies, religion is a series of dimensions. He acknowledges eight: ritual or practical; doctrinal or philosophical; mythic or narrative; experiential or emotional; ethical or legal; organizational

⁷⁵ Fiona Bowie, *The Anthropology of Religion: An Introduction* (Oxford and Malden: Blackwell, 2006), 268.

⁷⁶ We should note that myth as we see it was taken as truth by those who embraced the faith.

⁷⁷ Emile Durkheim, "The Elementary Forms of Religious Life," quoted in *Anthropology of Religion: A Handbook*, ed. Stephen D. Glazier (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1997), 7.

⁷⁸ Phillips Stevens, Jr., *Anthropology of Religion: Critical Concepts in Religious Studies, Volume I* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), 39.

⁷⁹ Bowie, *Anthropology* (2001), 6.

or social; material or artistic; and political and economic.⁸⁰ These “can be seen as a reminder to theologians and historians of religion not to forget the practical, aesthetic, and emotional aspects of religion in their concentration on scriptures and doctrinal formulae.”⁸¹ For the Waldensians, religion was much more than the Scriptures, though those were a foundational aspect of the movement. The unifying cultural system and the socio-cultural aspects of religion that sustained them pre-Reformation (including, *inter alia*, anti-Catholicism, a strong sense of community, belief in professing the true religion of Christ since apostolic times, and identification with a ‘Waldensian’ religious identity) were indeed present both pre- and post-Reformation.

Anthropological and sociological theories present religion as a cultural system subject to manipulation from other cultural systems. One system affects another and evolves to incorporate the influential elements. The truth in Waldensian continuity rests not in religion as a theological system, but in religion as a cultural system. As Raymond Firth asserts, “There is truth in every religion. But it is a human, not a divine truth.”⁸² Belief and faith transcend the realm of reality.⁸³ Even the most staunchly anti-continuity historians do touch on the importance of socio-cultural and psychological continuity, as we saw above when Audisio, Cameron, Tourn and others considered what measures of cultural continuity did persist through the Reformation.

With religion no longer defined primarily in terms of doctrine, we begin to see the Waldensians in a new light. The Waldensian ideological discourse follows this framework, and demonstrates a concrete example of these ideas. Historians examining the Waldensians

⁸⁰ Ninian Smart, *Dimensions of the Sacred: an Anatomy of the World's Beliefs* (London: Harper Collins, 1996), 10-11, in Bowie, *Anthropology* (2001), 24.

⁸¹ Bowie, *Anthropology* (2001), 24.

⁸² Raymond Firth, *Religion: A Humanist Interpretation* (Oxford: Routledge, Taylor & Francis, 1995), 215. In Stevens, *Anthropology of Religion: Volume I*, 33.

⁸³ Durkheim, ‘Elementary Forms,’ in Lambek, *A Reader*, 34-47.

tend to shy away from this ideology, instead using evidence from the Roman Inquisition to support their views on discontinuity. Of course, this privileges theology, and this is a bias that constrains conclusions. Nonetheless, the Inquisition remains our most varied and valuable source of information of the Waldensians in the thirteenth, fourteenth, and fifteenth centuries.

Current historiography tends to limit the idea of continuity rather narrowly to religion. The Waldensians in Piedmont continued to live in the same area, carried on the same family names, spoke the same Romantic dialect, and cultivated and celebrated the same heritage of religion and resistance even after the Reformation. When the Waldensians became Protestants, they retained considerable ethnic and social cohesiveness; they did not dissolve into the wider world of Protestantism. It is unassailable that great change came with the Reformation, but despite this, is it possible to claim a measure of continuity through that change? Perhaps examining the evolution of the Waldensians from new perspectives will shed light on the idea of religious continuity as a socio-cultural phenomenon rather than a solely theological idea.

CHAPTER TWO: AN ALTERNATE PERSPECTIVE ON CONTINUITY

“For every church is orthodox to itself; to others, erroneous or heretical. Whatsoever any church believes, it believes to be true, and the contrary thereunto it pronounces to be error. So that the controversy between these churches...is on both sides equal; nor is there any judge...upon earth by whose sentence it can be determined.”¹

The Waldensians and their supporters in the Reformation era conjured up a narrative of a long tradition of continuity for the Waldensian religion. They claimed continuous and unchanging doctrine and practice, even after their adoption of Calvinism. Conversely, virtually every modern historian studying the Waldensians has analyzed and agreed upon the ‘death’ of Waldensianism after 1532. Certainly the group went through radical changes; the movement evolved from a lay group of itinerant preachers to a clandestine heresy to an established Reformed church. Was the change a sudden drastic revolution, or did the group evolve gradually? The merging of the religious groups of the Piedmontese valleys with the larger umbrella Reformed Religion unquestionably denoted a remarkable change from the quasi-Catholic background of the Waldensians. But did the Reformation signal the demise of the Waldensians? The group’s own historiography suggests a firm belief in the religious movement’s continuance through the Reformation and into the future. Indeed, the group contends that they and their ancestors have “been in the uninterrupted possession of the aforesaid *Vallies*, and of the same Religion we profess at this very day, without any considerable Alteration either in *Doctrine* or *Discipline*.”² This statement is of interest for two reasons: first, that the Waldensians are adamant in their insistence on the continuity of their religion, and second, that they equate the importance of their place of residence, a

¹ John Locke, *A Letter on Toleration*, ed. Raymond Klibansky and JW Gough (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), VI: 18-19.

² Anonymous, *The Declaration and Manifesto of the Protestants of the Vallies of Piedmont, called the Vaudois* (London: Thomas Salusbury at the Sign of the Temple, 1690), 2.

socio-cultural factor, with the importance of doctrine and discipline in their religion; this will be a central factor in our discussions of continuity.

As noted, the great Waldensian historians of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries are nearly unanimous in the opinion that the Waldensians do *not* possess the same religion as the one with which they began.³ It is not the intent of this thesis to dispute the truth that the Poor of Lyons underwent a transformation and adopted a distinctly different set of doctrines; what I suggest is that this is not determinative of the question of what constituted their religion, let alone their identity, and that Waldensianism did endure post-Reformation. Most historians are adamant that Waldensianism cannot have survived its absorption into the Reformed Religion. Indeed, as Audisio pithily notes, “it was impossible to be Waldensian *and* Protestant at the same time.”⁴ And, perhaps, he is correct: the Waldensians, believing in their individuality, did not refer to themselves as Protestants.⁵ They were, however, deeply sure that their attachment to the Reformation had not compromised their identity as Waldensian.

Can we reconcile the divergent beliefs of contemporaneous Waldensians and contemporary historians? Why might historians believe in a change so abrupt as to signal the death of Waldensianism, while the group itself proudly proclaimed the *ancienneté* and direct continuity of their religion? Instead of concentrating narrowly on the teleological (though valid) view imposed by modern historians that the religion’s break was inevitable in 1532, we will focus on the view of the Waldensians themselves, which without exception proclaims religious continuity.

³ These historians include Gabriel Audisio, Euan Cameron, Peter Biller, Giovanni Gonnet, Amedeo Molnar, Christine Thouzellier, Emilio Comba, Grado Merlo and Giorgio Tourn.

⁴ Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival*, Trans. Claire Davison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 221.

⁵ See Arnaud, Léger, etc.

The history of the Waldensians has been written by relying primarily on inquisitorial documents and other Catholic, anti-heretical literature due to a significant dearth of early Waldensian sources.⁶ This approach, however, often takes Waldensian literature and that coming from external sources at equal value. These internal and external sources form disparate discourses which we can trace from the Poor of Lyons' inception right through the movement's evolution and eventual association with the Reformation and onwards.

The Waldensian documents address theological issues, but they are also concerned with promoting a certain image or identity which they maintain throughout their history while also undergoing the organic evolution of time. The inquisitorial records are concerned primarily with the Waldensians as heretics, and thus concentrate on theological and doctrinal practice.⁷ The inquisition records focus on constructing an image of the Waldensians as heretics, which they juxtapose against the image of the Church. Herein lies the problem of existing historical analyses of the Waldensians: historians have privileged the inquisitorial sources in their research in order to discover the rituals, practices, and theological doctrines of the Waldensians.⁸ As Carlo Ginzburg notes, inquisitorial trials pose problems with interpretation. Ginzburg, researching sixteenth century witchcraft trials, "wanted to understand what witchcraft meant to its protagonists...but the available documentation served only as a barrier, hopelessly preventing a true grasp of popular witchcraft. Everywhere [he] ran up against inquisitorial concepts of witchcraft derived from sources of learned origin."⁹ The inquisitorial records hold a great deal of valuable information, but because they were forced testimonies, show what the inquisitors wanted the subjects to

⁶ See Audisio, Cameron, Gonnet, Molnar, Pezet, Biller, etc.

⁷ See the treatises and inquisition records of Bernard Gui, Moneta de Cremona, Jean de Roma, Claude de Seyssel, and le Bossuet, among others.

⁸ See, in particular, Audisio, Cameron, Gonnet, Molnar, Thouzellier, Biller and Pezet.

⁹ Carlo Ginzburg, *The Cheese and the Worms*, trans. John and Anne Tedeschi (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1992), xix.

believe. Nevertheless, Ginzburg is firm in his belief that “the fact that a source is not ‘objective’ does not mean that it is useless.”¹⁰ Julien Théry calls inquisition records our “closest sources, or rather the least distant, from the realities of dissidence.”¹¹ However, for our purposes, relying on inquisitorial documents diminishes the importance of the documents produced by the Waldensians themselves and the importance of non-doctrinal aspects of the identity discussion. Using the Waldensian discourse to discuss the merits of continuity, we discover that there is a direct measure of continuity of their beliefs and the representation of themselves, as well as more than one 'break' in the evolution (i.e. there were ‘breaks’ both at the time of their excommunication and through the Reformation).

Accordingly, we will study the evolution of Waldensianism to address the issue of continuity, and looking at the process primarily from Waldensian sources, we will examine social, cultural, socio-economic, and religious factors. Reliance on inquisition documents will be kept to a minimum; some inquisition records provide material that is likely strictly Waldensian, and I will make sparing use of it when it is appropriate or necessary.

The Waldensian discourse presents the devotees of the movement as the guardians of the True Message of Christ, Defenders of the Faith.¹² Their understanding of themselves is vastly different than the understanding promoted by the Church, and this is the difference we must emphasize. We will use documents of Waldensian provenance to discover their own depictions of themselves, their beliefs, and the way they wished to be seen and promoted. But before we set out to examine the Waldensian evolution, it must be clarified that whatever happened, the Waldensians were doing what they needed to do to live and thrive. All

¹⁰ Ginzburg, *Cheese and Worms*, xvii.

¹¹ Julién Théry, “L’hérésie des bons hommes: Comment nommer la dissidence religieuse non vaudoise ni béguine en Languedoc?” *Heresis* 36-37 (2002): 79.

¹² See Huesca, Morel, Léger, Arnaud, etc.

religions change and evolve in order to survive and remain relevant, even reinterpreting their basic tenets to conform with and appeal to society. We can point to recent examples such as the changing role of women in the Church today, or the emergence of Liberation Theology, a social justice emphasis in Catholicism in Latin America.¹³ The Waldensians made changes, lived in secrecy, and evolved in order to sustain the vitality of their beliefs and we should not automatically equate such change with a loss of religious identity.

Beginnings: the Poor of Lyons and their Beliefs

Our examination of the evolution of Waldensianism and the case for continuity will open with the outset of the movement. The founding tenets of Valdès' Poor of Lyons movement were poverty, preaching, and the inviolability of the gospel. Of those, the purity of the Scriptures was the overarching unifier; the other ideals of poverty and preaching derived from rules mandated in the gospels. In Valdès' opinion, the Word of God was precise and infallible. There was no need whatsoever to interpret it.¹⁴ The belief in a simple and literal adherence to the precepts of the Scriptures was certainly not a new idea, and the Waldensians were not the first to be condemned for it.¹⁵ In order to apply the Word of God, people had to understand it, so Valdès commissioned two clergymen from Lyons to translate the Vulgate. The Word, once translated, had to be applied to the letter. Access to the scriptures - and thus the ability to understand them - was crucially important to the

¹³ 'Liberation Theology' explores the relationship between Catholic theology and political activism, focusing on poverty, social justice and human rights. It is a call to action against poverty in order to put in effect Christ's mission of justice for the world.

¹⁴ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 11.

¹⁵ In 1024, a group of peasants in Arras was examined for their belief in a literal adherence to the precepts of the New Testament, which made them skeptical of certain teachings and claims of the Church, much like the Waldensians 150 years later. R.I. Moore, *The Formation of a Persecuting Society: Authority and Deviance in Western Europe 950-1250* (Malden: Blackwell, 2007), 16.

Waldensians, and would continue to be a defining factor of their religious culture. The oral culture that was so important for the early Waldensians continued through clandestinity and indeed into the Reformation, but they also developed an important (and unusual for rural movements) book culture.¹⁶

The tenet of poverty was derived from biblical instruction: Christ had advised a rich man searching for perfection to “go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven.”¹⁷ Like poverty, the need to preach the Word of God derived from clear evangelical directives: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations...teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you,” and, even more explicitly, “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature.”¹⁸ The initial evangelical movement sought not to break with the Catholic Church, but to complement the organization by providing services they believed the Church could not always offer. Valdès wanted no separate hierarchy; no leader to challenge the clergy.¹⁹ He sought instead to rectify what he viewed as his own worldly wrongs (as well as the worldly wrongs of the Church), and this became a popular concept, attracting followers to join with Valdès in a community of lay preachers living in the mould of the apostles. The *Liber Antiheresis* (ca. 1180-1210), the sole surviving Waldensian treatise from the foundational years, affirms the initial intent of the Waldensians to remain in the Catholic fold.²⁰ Durand de Huesca, the text’s erudite author, maintains that Valdès and his followers not only remained orthodox, “but also had no intention of doing otherwise. The preachers were indeed fully accountable to Christ, Lord of the apostles. Valdès himself was not the community’s sovereign. His authority was that of

¹⁶ P. Biller and A. Hudson, *Heresy and Literacy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), *passim*.

¹⁷ Matthew 19:21

¹⁸ Matthew, 28:19-20 and Mark 16:15.

¹⁹ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 113.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 16

founder, of the first man to be ‘called’. The only canon was that they should live like apostles by their ministry of preaching, according to the New Testament.”²¹ As Huesca averred, “the decision we have taken is this: to maintain, until our death, faith in God and the Church’s sacraments; to preach freely, according to the grace given by God to us; this we will not cease to do for any cause.”²² The *Liber* is the closest we come to possessing an early theological treatise, but is more a disparagement of heretics than any specific statement of Waldensian theology. This discourse is adamant in its belief in the truth of their conception of Christianity, and we will see this conviction carried throughout the centuries.

That the Waldensians usurped the power of the clergy was not initially of consequence, since in their minds they were merely meeting the needs of the populace by correcting the earthly failings of the Church, not supplanting its religious teachings. They followed in a tradition advocating Church reform that stretched back to the tenth century. These people believed that the Church needed “the corruption of its government and the laxity of its priests expunged, so that it could respond to the spiritual needs of those who sought salvation through illumination of the soul, the rejection of worldly wealth and power, and the imitation of the apostles.”²³ Since the Church was rather slow to take up their suggestions, Valdès and his followers accepted the duty. Indeed, Huesca described how Valdès had been chosen to fulfill the apostolic task of preaching against error when Christ saw that the prelates “were dedicated to greed, simony, pride, avarice, feasting...lechery, and other disgraceful acts” and thus unable to do their duty.²⁴ Huesca also promoted the idea of a holy space being wherever the faithful are, rather than the faithful flocking to a certain

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² Durand of Huesca, *Liber Antiheresis*. In Giorgio Tourn, *You are my Witnesses: The Waldenses across 800 Years* (Turin: Claudiana, 1989), 15.

²³ Moore, *Persecuting Society*, 17.

²⁴ Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 27. From a translation of Huesca’s Prologue.

building: “L’Eglise de Dieu est toujours et partout où il y a un rassemblement de fidèles, qui ont une foi integre...”²⁵

However, by challenging the clergy’s monopoly of the Word, the Waldensians provoked first appreciation, then reprobation, and finally, in 1215, explicit condemnation by the Church. Despite this, in the early days, the Church hierarchy was still to receive all due honour, provided that the priests were morally upright, and so long as it did not contradict their mission held from Christ.²⁶ Valdès’ confession of faith conformed generally to Catholic doctrine, and he professed to believe in all seven sacraments, although he adopted the Donatist principle that the sacraments were invalid if administered by a sinful priest.²⁷ This would come to be one of the most widely held tenets in the Waldensian diaspora. Other beliefs recorded in this period include the rejection of prayers for the dead, a rejection of oaths and falsehood, and a condemnation of the death penalty and violence, all based on a literal interpretation of the scriptures.²⁸

From the thirteenth century onwards, the Waldensians were forced to present their ideas and beliefs in the face of a persecuting hierarchy. The wealth of ideologies that permeated the diaspora became evident later, and the ideals promoted by Valdès were not clearly articulated. Despite this lack of clarity, and notwithstanding pressures from the Church, the Waldensians continued to defend their (somewhat ambiguous) beliefs and continued to preach. For the Waldensians,

Their first aim and *raison d’être* [was] the dissemination of the word of Christ. The main prerequisite for this task is a profound and firm knowledge of the Scriptures.... Within this context, to be missionaries therefore becomes an obligation, an

²⁵ Durand de Huesca, *Enchiridion fontium valdensium*, vol. I (Torre Pellice, 1958), 41-42. In Giovanni Gonnet and Amedeo Molnar, *Les Vaudois au Moyen-Age* (Turin: Claudiana, 1974), 5.

²⁶ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 16.

²⁷ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 18.

²⁸ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 17.

indispensable condition for the true followers of Christ. All members of the group are bound to be missionaries but, above all, to be preachers. The practice of preaching is deemed essential to the group's being.²⁹

Preaching was the most important mission of the Waldensians, particularly as they believed that they were providing a service the dissolute clergy could not legitimately provide. Further to this, they began to commend confession to laymen, arguing that sinful priests were less qualified to hear confession than a pure layman, or even, much to the Church's dismay, than a pure laywoman. However, this was not supposed to be in opposition to the Church, but rather to help the Church combat the rising threat of the Albigensians.³⁰ The Waldensians pronounced themselves to be vehemently opposed to the Albigensians, and their greatest defence against that movement was to preach widely and loudly the virtues of Christianity as they believed correct.

The identity of the Poor of Lyons was intrinsically bound to the practices of poverty and preaching. As Cameron notes, these were the distinguishing traits of their movement which set them apart from the mainstream: "for most of the people who saw the Waldensian preachers at work, their doctrine would have been less distinctive and less memorable than their way of life."³¹ Vinay bolsters this idea that the theological was less central than the social and communal, noting that "the medieval Waldensian protest...had a character more moral, social, and disciplinary than theological in the exact sense of the term."³² This emphasis on the social rather than the theological aspect of Waldensianism speaks to the idea that the former was just as important as the latter in defining the Waldensian identity.

²⁹ Caterina Bruschi, *The Wandering Heretics of Languedoc* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 130.

³⁰ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 18.

³¹ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 30.

³² Valdo Vinay, *Le confessioni di fede dei Valdesi riformati*, trans. Euan Cameron (Torino, 1975), 11.

In excommunicating the Waldensians for their ‘heretical’ belief in the priesthood of all believers, the Catholic Church spawned a heresy that was not otherwise technically real: the Waldensian separation from the Church did not exist until the Church made it so. Indeed, part of the initial impetus for Waldensianism was to preach *against* heretics; to suddenly be classified as members of that group was quite unanticipated.³³ They were “driven into heresy by an episcopal and then a papal demand for obedience.”³⁴ Despite the initial resolve of the group to seek reconciliation with the Church, their continued exclusion pushed the Waldensians to form a more cohesive community and to reevaluate their own beliefs, cleaving irredeemably from the Catholic Church and forging a separate future. Given their origins as a supplement to the Church, it is not surprising that the Waldensians grew increasingly bitter against the claims and authority of the Roman clergy.³⁵

As they began to forge a future separate from the Church, the Waldensians decided to congregate. The subsequent 1218 Conference of Bergamo confirmed some basic Waldensian beliefs, but also set in stone some interfactional divisions.³⁶ Some decisions were quite reflective of later Protestant ideals, while others remained close to Catholic values despite their insistence on distancing themselves.³⁷ Already breaking with one of the deepest-held tenets of Valdès, the groups agreed that the Poor should be allowed to labour, and not rely entirely on alms from the community. This was directly contrary to Valdès’ belief that the apostle must live from his preaching alone, but necessary to ensure the survival of the movement.³⁸

³³ Moore, *Persecuting Society*, 22.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66-7.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁶ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 27

³⁷ For example, divorce was permitted in certain circumstances, and they agreed that the holy scriptures were the ultimate source of reference.

³⁸ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 27.

The Waldensians continued to believe that they were good Christians, albeit with differing views than the Church on some key issues, and thus even though the Poor continued to live – by and large – by the rules of their movement, they found ways to integrate themselves into the surrounding Catholic communities. Even as they began to form more organized communities and moved further away from orthodoxy, they posed as good Catholics who went to church and participated in religious life to avoid detection.³⁹ But because they believed they held the True Church, it could therefore not reside in the Catholic Church.

The foundational ideology of the Waldensians did not create a separate religion in itself, and thus did not merit a specific theological treatise to display its beliefs. This paucity of sources has left the initial Waldensian doctrine somewhat ambiguous and undefined, and accordingly a cultural reading of the movement has its merits in expanding our understanding of the Waldensians as a people. Because of this lack of contemporaneous sources, historians are often forced to rely upon sources produced much later to define the belief systems and practices of the Poor of Lyons.

One extant and truly unique source from the early days of Waldensianism remains. *La Nobla Leyczon* is a poem originally produced in the 1200s (later falsely credited by the Waldensians to have emerged around 1100 in order to prove that Valdès was not the group's founder, as he did not begin preaching until the 1170s). It is, essentially, a verse summary of the entire Bible story. The text is almost the only example of the original group using the term 'Waldensian' in reference to themselves:

If there is any good person who wishes to love God and Jesus Christ, who does not wish to curse or swear or lie, or commit adultery or kill or take what is another's, or

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 17.

revenge himself on his enemy, they say he is a Waldensian [*vaudes*] and worthy to be punished, and find accusations with lies and with deceit.⁴⁰

In the poem we also find an early reference to rejection of the popes as antichrist, and the idea of God as the only saviour. Even more striking is the reference to what would later become a key Protestant myth: that the Waldensians were part of the Church until the Donation of Constantine, whereupon the Church became corrupt with its entanglements in the world, and the Waldensians split from the hierarchy to carry on the True Church.

All the popes there have been since Sylvester until the present one, And all the cardinals, and all the bishops, and all the abbots, All these together do not have enough power, To be able to forgive a single mortal sin. God alone can forgive, since no one else can do so.⁴¹

The poem ends with a call to true penitence, which is described as interior contrition and repentance: only God forgives, not popes, cardinals or prelates, so one must repent and do penitence in the present life. It exhorts the reader to follow Christ in a life of spirituality, poverty, and chastity.⁴² Alas, the poem does not articulate a definite, precise doctrine, a recurring issue in early Waldensian history. It does, however, provide evidence of the early evolution of Waldensian ideology toward what we now view as Protestant ideals.

La Nobla Leyczon is now housed in a manuscript containing four other Waldensian poems. They call for the persecuted minority to endure tribulations and to be true to God.⁴³ The *Novel Confort* warns hearers against ‘dreaming through life,’ and promotes a rejection of worldly goods: “one cannot serve God and the world: everything worldly is damnable.”

The poem then lists all the sins to be avoided and calls on the hearer to cultivate all the

⁴⁰ *La Nobla Leycon*, Cambridge University Library, MS Dd. xv. 30, fos 96v-107v, fo. 105r. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 222.

⁴¹ C. Papini, *La Nobile Lezione. La Nobla Leicon. Pometto medievale Valdese* (Torino, Claudiana, 2003), v. 418-424. Trans. Gabriel Audisio. In Gabriel Audisio, *Preachers by Night: The Waldensian Barbes*, Trans. Claire Davison (Leiden, Netherlands: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2007), 152.

⁴² Cameron, *Waldenses*, 223.

⁴³ *La Nobla Leyczon*, Cambridge, University Library, MS Dd. xv. 30, fos 79v-118v. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 221.

virtues “including perseverance and patience in tribulation and persecution.”⁴⁴ The *Novel Sermon* is similar. It discusses false clerics and designates three ‘classes’ of piety: the best people are either “the contemplatives who live in poverty; or the second class who are chaste and live by work; or the third, that of the married who live well.”⁴⁵ The other two poems are short and unremarkable. The ‘Father Eternal’ and ‘Barca’ (ship) are both moralizing poems reiterating the principles of the former three documents.⁴⁶ Despite this cache of documents, the information we receive is more useful in defining a way of life and a system of belief than in differentiating Waldensian doctrine, corroborating the assertion that attachment to Waldensianism rested more on a socio-cultural definition. The promotion of a lifestyle as well as the Bible in their discourse (more specifically of the Scriptures) applies to both the early Catholic days of the Waldensians, and the later era of Protestant association.

Clandestinity: Rupture or Continuity?

The Waldensians’ clandestine heterodoxy developed and evolved over the four centuries following their excommunication in 1215. As a result of being progressively and lastingly marginalized, the Waldensians gradually hardened their positions, sometimes adopting tenets of other dissents that had not previously been theirs.⁴⁷ Indeed, one of the most important factors of the Waldensian identity in the diaspora would become a self-definition *against* Catholicism; their legacy of exclusion formed a key part of their

⁴⁴ *Novel Confort*, Cambridge University Library, MS Dd. xv. 30, fos 79v-86v. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 222.

⁴⁵ *Novel Sermon*, Cambridge University Library, MS Dd. xv. 30, fos 86v-96v. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 222.

⁴⁶ *Father Eternal, Barca*, Cambridge University Library, MS Dd. xv. 30, fos 107v-111r; 111r-118v. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 222.

⁴⁷ This was not a universal trend, but limited more to pockets and specific communities.

consciousness.⁴⁸ While this antipathy towards Catholicism is documented in the Waldensian discourse, it also figures prominently in the inquisitorial discourse, and the ways in which it is depicted underscore the difference in the images promoted by the disparate source bases.⁴⁹ The Waldensian opposition to Catholicism was based essentially in a rejection of corruption, but the Catholic portrayal of the Waldensian's antagonism was given a more personal and subjective twist. They believed strongly in the foundations of the Church; it was the earthly manifestation and corruption of that body which they rejected.⁵⁰ In their view they had kept the faith while the Church became dishonoured and despoiled. They believed their religion was orthodox; Catholicism the antichrist. This was, in its own way, a distinct theology in itself: their belief in preserving the word of God was a foundational tenet.

The movement's excommunication forced its adherents to alter their lives and religious practice drastically in order to continue to live in the fold. Clandestinity would prove a great challenge to the existing form of Waldensianism.⁵¹ The break with Catholicism and subsequent obligatory clandestinity formed the first great shift in Waldensianism. Following their excommunication in 1215, the very foundations of the movement – itinerant preaching, mendicant poverty, and living by the Scriptures – became, suddenly, illicit activities, and the Waldensians were forced to completely transform their lives and thus their religious practice. So, while many historians claim that the death of Waldensianism occurred with the Reformation, could it not also be argued that the movement underwent a change so drastic as to speak of its death at this juncture?

⁴⁸ This definition against Catholicism would sweep late medieval Europe with the Great Schism and the subsequent trend of anti-clericalism and radicalization, expanding the horizon of countercultural movements and broadening the Waldensians' sympathy base.

⁴⁹ See Bernard Gui, *Le Livre des Sentences vols I & II*. Trans. Annette Pales-Gobillard. Paris: CNRS Editions, 2002.

⁵⁰ Tourn, *Witnesses*, 26.

⁵¹ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 35.

For the Waldensians, neither juncture constituted the death of their movement. While the movement certainly evolved organically over the centuries, two main periods of change marked the mutation of Waldensianism, and these can be measured in terms of the Waldensian discourse on the events. The first split (anathema and excommunication in the thirteenth century) created an antagonism and an oppositional discourse; the Waldensians defined themselves against something concrete. The second rupture (Reformation) produced a precisely opposite reaction. While they maintained the anti-Catholic bent that had characterized the movement since its excommunication, their association with the Reformation created a discourse of inclusion and acceptance. The former change in discourse was far more drastic than the latter. Initially, the Waldensians intended to remain in the Catholic fold, and their post-anathema discourse reflects their anger and betrayal via their modified treatment of and by the Church.⁵² This position was maintained throughout the diaspora, and indeed throughout their association with the Reformation. In terms of discourse, then, one could argue that the more serious rupture came in the thirteenth century, and decidedly not in the sixteenth. At the time of the Reformation, the Waldensians began to associate themselves with a dissenting movement criticizing Catholicism, something which they had already been doing for centuries. They did not associate with any specific group of Reformers, but rather kept their name and identity in their post-Reformation discourse and maintained the ideas of *ancienneté*, continuity, and belief in maintaining the True Church in the face of the Church's failure, all of which they had professed before the Reformation ever reached the Piedmontese valleys.⁵³

⁵² Unfortunately, the only evidence of the Waldensians' reaction to their exclusion from and rejection of the church comes from inquisitorial records, but it is reasonable to assume that their distaste for the Church's corruption from before their excommunication carried over and developed even further after their exclusion.

⁵³ Cf. Henri Arnaud, Jean Léger, etc.

While the most prominent historians of Waldensianism do not deal with this discourse, they do agree with the idea of a major rupture occurring in the thirteenth century, if on a different level. Cameron certainly concurs with this line of thought, even as he argues for the movement's survival through clandestinity and subsequent demise with the Reformation:

The most radical discontinuity in terms of practice – and even of belief – in the whole history of Waldensianism is that which first divides the early anti-heretical poor preachers of the 'first phase' in the late twelfth century from the clandestine, anti-sacerdotal ministry of the mid-thirteenth century onwards. In the beginnings, the Waldenses as voluntary preachers, lay and clergy, undertook to resist Catharism through public testimony and disputation. Their criticism of the Church was more implicit than theoretical: they held their mission to be necessary because the clergy were not up to the task. Rejection by the hierarchy and subsequent pursuit by inquisitors soon transformed the public ministry of preaching into the private, secret one of hearing confession and preaching to concealed groups of supporters behind closed doors...persecution can only have accentuated the anti-clericalism which led to vehement disbelief in and rejection of the Church's 'holiness'. Such rejection of the Church was not essential to the movement in its first years: it was something which only grew on it over time.⁵⁴

After this monumental break with the Church, Waldensianism underwent a radical change.

Audisio stresses the speed with which this transformation occurred, but does not believe that this signaled an end to the first community.⁵⁵

The urgent need to go underground was to change not only the lives of the Brothers in general, as was only to be expected, but also the ways in which their movement was to evolve. Their primary mission, the very reason for which they existed, was to announce the Word of Christ. This obviously implied the duty to preach in public. Suddenly, they were forced into hiding, labeled and hunted down as heretics; their Brothers were designated as partners in crime, their books and sermons dismissed as erroneous. The initial goal of converting others to evangelical poverty could henceforth be maintained only in an indirect, moderate way since fear of being denounced compelled them to be silent.⁵⁶

⁵⁴ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 299.

⁵⁵ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 37.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

This contrasts with his later argument that the speed with which the Waldensians adopted the Reformation is reflective of a fracture.⁵⁷ Realistically, the process in the early 1200s and that in the mid-1500s took approximately the same amount of time, and Audisio emphasizes this rapidity. After the changes instigated by the Waldensians' 1532 synod, the *barbes* continued to make their rounds, if this time announcing that they were following a changed ideology. In precisely the opposite manner of their descent into clandestinity, the *barbes* set off on their missionary rounds in 1532 “announcing the new measure to the families they visited: there would be no more meetings, no more confessing to *barbes*; they were no longer to attend mass in the parish church.”⁵⁸ But eight years after this crucial synod, “the *barbes* continued to endorse the Reformation half-heartedly.... If the *barbes*, who were in a position to bring about such changes, reacted in this way, what happened in the community as a whole?”⁵⁹ Audisio answers his own question with an assertion that seems to justify the idea of a continuous evolution rather than a rupture: concrete signs of adherence to the Reformation can only be found starting around 1555-1560, nearly thirty years after the decision to join the Reformed tradition.⁶⁰

During this necessary period, theoretical decisions were put into practice, former *barbes* and new pastors had to win the people's trust and the community as a whole had to grasp and accept decrees imposed upon them which to some extent changed their lives. The thirty-year period represented an entire generation, particularly at a time when life expectancy was so short. In other words, as the older generation, who were probably more attached to their ancestral past, disappeared, they made way for a younger generation brought up on reformed theology and moral doctrines, thus enabling the new ideas to penetrate the former Waldensian community.⁶¹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 187.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 179.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 186.

Audisio's words belie his argument for rupture. I remain unconvinced that the early radical change should be treated any differently than the paradigm shift three hundred years later. Regardless of theological differences, the first rupture would have been, culturally speaking, more drastic. The break from Catholicism, resulting in rejection, antagonism, and secrecy, would have been more of a shock to the system than changes made to allow acceptance into a welcoming community of religious reform. Modern historians use the word 'evolution' to describe the early shift; should not the later shift be considered an evolution as well?

In any case, the need for secrecy at the early juncture pushed the movement away from public professions of faith, and forced them to adopt a new set of practices. Literature produced within the group became even scarcer. Most of the sources we have to rely on for information about belief, doctrine, practice, and community for the next three hundred years were produced by detractors, and these sources are problematic in their own right. Many are inquisition records, some of which appear to be honest professions, others of which are confessions forced under duress.

Only one record of Waldensian writing from the fourteenth century exists.⁶² This rare document is a correspondence between the German and Italian branches of the Poor of Lyons, and they contend that they are the 'true shepherds' of Christ's religion.⁶³ Most notably, the letters contain the ca. 1354 *Book of the Elect (Liber electorum)*. This is a Latin document of about a thousand words describing the origin of the Waldensian movement. In the *Book*, as well as in the letters, 'Pierre le Vaudois' or 'Pierre de la Vallée' is presented as an ordained preacher, and as the restorer rather than the founder of Waldensianism, which

⁶² While we have only once piece of Waldensian evidence from this period, there is a body of inquisitorial evidence that provides support for the concept of a gradual socio-cultural evolution over this time.

⁶³ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 223.

according to this treatise actually dated back to Pope Sylvester.⁶⁴ This legend was already over a century old, but the *Book* adapted a preexisting medieval story to fit the Waldensian context:

It claimed that for the first three centuries the Church was holy, pure and above all *poor*, until the time of the Emperor Constantine. Constantine, suffering from leprosy, called on Pope Sylvester I to baptize him and was cured of his leprosy. As a reward, Constantine gave Sylvester power and authority over the western Empire, and himself left for the east to found Constantinople. Sylvester accepted the proffered wealth; but [and here the Waldensian account differed from the traditional story] a companion or companions of his broke away from the now wealthy and decaying Church, and remained in their former state of poverty. Eight hundred years after Constantine there arose someone called Petrus Waldis, a good rich man. He read, or heard read, the gospel precepts on poverty, sold his goods and gave to the poor, gathered disciples and confronted the 'heresiarch' (the pope) at Rome....he travelled throughout Italy and he and his successors gathered many supporters...For two hundred years they were able to preach in public. Thereafter persecutions arose which had continued to the present time.⁶⁵

This tradition placed the foundation of Waldensianism in Italy rather than in Lyons. It also claimed a surprisingly long (though incorrect) period of time for the absence of persecution. The account drew criticism from Catholic readers, so the Italians gave reason for why their account lacked precision:

The reason we cannot answer, or give proof, as positively as it is written or proved in other chronicles...is two-fold. The first is because of the absence of witnesses: for there is no one today who has heard or seen the true origins of the matter, because a long time has passed. The second and more important reason is because of the innumerable persecutions which we have suffered, through which many times our books have been reduced as it were to nothing, such that we could barely preserve the sacred page.⁶⁶

The Waldensian insistence on their ancient origins and purity of religion without clear proof was a trend that would continue throughout their existence, and characterized the movement across the centuries.

⁶⁴ Giovanni Gonnè and Amedeo Molnar, *Les Vaudois au Moyen-Age* (Turin: Claudiana, 1974), 43.

⁶⁵ *The Book of the Elect*, in Cameron, *Waldenses*, 119-120.

⁶⁶ Peter Biller, "Aspects of the Waldenses in the Fourteenth Century Including an Edition of their Correspondence" (Oxford University D.Phil. Thesis, 1977), 289. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 121.

Inquisition Records as a Platform for Waldensian Speech

The Inquisition began in France in 1232, and the Waldensians were forced deeper into hiding to save themselves and their religion. Despite this new culture of secrecy, we have more records from this era than from the early days due to the dogged persecution of the Inquisition. These years were transitional years for the Waldensians as they struggled to adapt to their new circumstances. Nevertheless, inquisitors such as the prolific Bernard Gui attempted to catalogue Waldensian beliefs and practices in the early fourteenth century, providing us with a snapshot of the group. Despite the potentially biased nature of the testimonies, a great deal of information is made accessible due to these accounts. While the inquisitors undoubtedly framed their questions in a manner conducive to showing the Waldensians in an incriminatory light, in certain cases, statements made by the Waldensians are enlightening nevertheless.

Adherents to Waldensianism, believing in their purity as Christians, needed to find a way to rationalize their surreptitious existence following their forced clandestinity post-excommunication. One Waldensian woman, Peroneta, questioned in 1335, related this account of the origins of Waldensianism, which she claimed to have heard from her pastors:

They also said that when Christ ascended to heaven he left twelve apostles in the world to preach his faith. Four of these kept his books; but the other eight went to make gardens and chanted from other books, not understanding them. However, the other four chanted from Christ's books and understood them all. Hearing this, the eight were stronger, and drove the four out of the Church. When the four had gone out into the square and chanted there, the eight were stronger and drove them out of the square. Then the four began to go about secretly and by night. The Waldenses added 'we keep to the way of the four to whom the books of Christ remained; the priests and the clergy follow the way of the other eight who wished to keep to a life of indulgence'.⁶⁷

⁶⁷ G.G. Merlo, *Eretici e inquisitori nella societa piemontese del trecento* (Turin: Claudiana, 1977), 220. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 153.

Evidently the analogy here is of the Waldensians as the four pure and learned apostles, and the Church as the eight oppressors. Even though this testimony came from an interrogation, Peroneta's speech was a voluntary response rather than an answer to a specific question. This is one of the earliest accounts to make reference to the Waldensians stemming from apostolic times rather than from Sylvester's time or from the days of Valdès, and speaks to the idea of a common origin that would later play an important role in Protestant martyrology. The cross-cultural ideal of apostolic origins held a great deal of value in the Waldensian identity. Audisio agrees that this development is new, and presents a convincing argument that by the fourteenth century the movement had evolved past the belief of Valdès as the ultimate source of Waldensianism:

The conviction that one belongs to a group derives from being conscious of having a common ancestry. By the fourteenth century, this shared heritage was based less around the memory of Valdès than on the legend that was then growing up giving the merchant from Lyons the Christian name Peter, alleging that he was a priest so as to bring legitimacy to later preachers, and most of all, by tracing the Poor of Lyons' origins back to the time of pope Sylvester I, or even further back to apostolic times. By so doing, the Poor of Lyons could maintain that they, like Peter and Paul, held their mission from Christ. This belief in a history dating back as far as the earliest days of Christianity can be found in testimonies written by leaders of the community, such as the exchange of letters in 1368 [between Austrian and Italian Brothers].⁶⁸

This mythologizing of origins became endemic in the Waldensian diaspora, an evolution from Valdès' time, and an idea that would characterize the movement until modern days.

We can also glean useful information on the evolution of certain socio-cultural factors from inquisition records. In Piedmont, there is evidence of development in the alteration of the strict Waldensian doctrine against the taking of oaths, as biblical passages ordered: 'Do not accustom your mouth to oaths,' and 'One who swears many oaths is full of

⁶⁸ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 46-47.

iniquity.⁶⁹ The prohibition against lying and swearing was maintained across most of the diaspora, but the Piedmontese Waldensians appear to have taken a more liberal interpretation of the orders. The texts discourage profane or casual swearing, rather than formal civil oaths. Because of this ambiguity, the Piedmontese, at least in the presence of inquisitors, did not hesitate to take judicial oaths.⁷⁰

What the inquisitorial records reveal to us is that the Waldensians were determined to live by the ideals set out by Valdès, but that the strict adherence to apostolic ideals was more applicable in theory than in practice, and as we have seen, evolved rapidly. They did try to promote the purity of Waldensianism in contrast to the perceived flaws of the Catholic Church. As a heretic interrogated by Moneta de Cremona in 1244 observed,

Neither Christ nor his disciples have ever persecuted anyone, but on the contrary, they suffered persecution. They cast no one out but were rather cast out themselves. They were beaten while beating no one. They were imprisoned, but imprisoned no one. The Roman Church, however, has done quite the opposite. It is she who hunts others while not being hunted herself.⁷¹

This indictment of the Church demonstrates the early evolution of Waldensianism to an unequivocally anti-Catholic position as well as solidifying the Waldensian view of an ‘us vs. them’ mentality. However, was this divisive antipathy created by the inquisition discourse, or did the Waldensians adopt a rigid anti-Catholic position organically? The objections the Waldensians had to the medieval Church were not confined to a singular time and place, and the Western Schism of 1378-1418 provoked an anticlerical crisis across the continent. This evolution, unfortunately, we cannot trace within Piedmontese Waldensian documents, as the

⁶⁹ Ecclesiasticus 23:9; 23:11.

⁷⁰ This is in contrast to the Waldensians in Bohemia and Austria, who strictly discouraged oaths of any type. Cameron, *Waldenses*, 159.

⁷¹ Susanna K. Treesh, “The Waldensian Recourse to Violence,” *Church History* 55:3 (September 1986), 296. Originally cited in Giovanni Gonnelli and Amedeo Molnar, *Les Vaudois au Moyen-Age* (Turin: Claudiana, 1974), 425-6. From the inquisition records of Moneta de Cremona, 1244, Editions Tommaso Agostino Ricchini, 1743, 508-9.

only extant document from the fourteenth century is an exchange of letters between Austrian and Lombard Waldensians dating from 1368. The fifteenth century is similarly unrepresented by Waldensian sources, and it is not until 1530 (just before the Waldensians associated with the Reformation) that we have documentation from the Waldensians themselves. It is thus entirely understandable that historians have relied so heavily on inquisitorial sources to uncover the history of the Waldensians, but in addition to relying on testimony offered under duress, this approach concentrates historical studies on the theological beliefs the inquisition focused on.

Evolution in a Socio-Cultural Context

The socio-economic and cultural situation of the Waldensians also underwent a transformation in the centuries following their excommunication. By the end of the fourteenth century, a rural outlook and membership had fully supplanted the movement's original urban foundations. As the Poor were forced into clandestinity and out of urban areas, their recruitment base drew less from wealthy urban merchants and more from rural labourers, who did not give up their professions as they adopted Waldensianism. Instead of relying on alms as they had done in metropolitan areas, the Waldensians adopted careers as herdsmen and crofters.⁷² This directly contravened Valdès' directive that the Poor were to survive - as the apostles did – on alms from their preaching alone. The move to a pastoral economy meant the chance of sustainable income that urban begging did not offer, but again this created a dilemma. What this sedentary economy meant in practice was that the foundational ideal of poverty was less strict than at the movement's outset. The *barbes* still

⁷² Treesh, "Recourse to Violence," 295; and Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 37.

maintained evangelic poverty and were much admired, but for most Waldensians, accumulating hereditary wealth and a home did not incur disapproval.⁷³ By the late fifteenth century, the Waldensians were still living in clandestine communities across Europe. The isolated groups had taken a variety of paths, some assimilating, some joining with other heresies, and some being eradicated through persecution. For those who remained in Piedmont-Savoy and the Dauphiné, some degree of continuity had been kept; some transformations had also occurred. For the Waldensians, continuity and change were not mutually exclusive; the core message of Waldensianism was preserved across the centuries, and that became the clearest and most important aspect of the religious movement.

Indeed, three centuries after Valdès' epiphany, what remained of the state of his three pillars of faith? Preaching, the most important tenet of the Poor of Lyons, remained essential but was completely changed in practice. No longer a right of the general public, preaching was limited to hidden circles and done only by a select few *barbes*, and it no longer aimed to recruit but rather to maintain. The original habit of preaching in public had been replaced by preaching in private, only to the converted. It appears that only the *barbes* were entitled to preach, but this is based only on inquisition records, which imposed a structural hierarchy on the Waldensians to reconcile the familiar with the unknown. The second pillar, poverty, remained a laudable evangelical value, but only the *barbes* were obliged to live strictly by the rule. Only the third pillar remained unchanged: using Scripture as the ultimate source of reference was still the same in practice as it had been for Valdès; followers did not seek to

⁷³ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 103.

interpret the word, merely to apply it.⁷⁴ The Bible, and more particularly the Gospel, remained the ultimate source of reference.⁷⁵

However, these changes may have had less to do with the rejection of these elements than to simple adjustment to time and circumstance. Not only did the necessities of clandestinity work against itinerant preaching and mendicant poverty, but society had ceased to see voluntary poverty as a Christian virtue, and began to distinguish between the deserving and the undeserving poor. Begging for alms was no longer ‘Christian’ but reserved for the unclean or destitute. Thus, the itinerant beggar of early Waldensianism virtually disappeared, signaling the demise of that part of the dissent. Only the *barbes* lived in evangelic poverty, but even this was done in secret.⁷⁶

The tenets the Waldensians observed immediately prior to the Reformation, generally, were a refusal to swear oaths (Jesus forbade oaths in the Scriptures); denial of purgatory (for lack of mention in the Bible); confession to *barbes* (rather than to a sinful priest); belief in the Eucharist (and the other sacraments) *if* the priest was pure; rejection of saints and indulgences as useless; belief in the purity and perfection of the Scriptures, and a rejection of lying.⁷⁷

By the time they joined with the Reformation, the Waldensians had also departed from their foundations on other matters. On their initial policy of non-violence, the Waldensians had reduced their stringency. In the 1487-88 crusades in the Dauphiné, the Waldensians did not hesitate to defend themselves against their aggressors.⁷⁸ This departure from apostolic serenity was echoed later by the *barbe* Georges Morel, who wrote to the

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 48.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 47-8.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 104.

⁷⁷ The refusal of lying was, in essence, a rejection of the Church. Since the Church had lied to its faithful by being corrupt, an explicit reversal of this signified purity.

⁷⁸ Treesh, ‘Recourse to Violence,’ 297.

reformers Oecolampadius and Bucer to seek advice on whether he should be permitted to counsel his followers to kill traitorous brethren (those who betrayed fellow Waldensians to the authorities).⁷⁹ These digressions from peaceful resistance would also become quite evident in the events of 1655 and 1686. From the sources examined above, it must be concluded that a socio-cultural evolution was an ongoing and continuing phenomenon which was well underway before the Reformation.

Reconciling Waldensianism with the Reformation

When the processes of Reformation emerged in 1517 and quickly made inroads across Europe, the Waldensians were not professing the exact religious beliefs they had at the outset of their movement. The changes and evolution the group had gone through began to reflect the lack of cohesion of the movement, and when the Reformation materialized many adherents appeared quite ready to question and challenge the integrity and theological purity of their movement.

An openly anti-Catholic and accepting religious interest group had obvious appeal to the hidden Waldensians. The disappearance of a unified Christian orthodox establishment and the concomitant rise of state-sponsored Protestantism offered an attractive alternative to the medieval Waldensian pattern, where secret itinerant *barbes* served furtive rural dissenters as they carved out a clandestine religious identity at odds with the prevailing culture. Having observed and communicated with the Hussite movement just a century before, the Waldensians were no strangers to the ideas of Reform. The Bohemian branch had merged with the Unity of Czech Brethren; the Piedmontese Waldensians had rejected this union but

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 300.

remained unsure of their own religious perfection. While there is not much evidence to draw on, it would appear that the emergence of the Reformation caused the Waldensians to question their interpretation (or rather lack thereof) of the Bible and Christianity, or at least coincided with a religious uneasiness in the community.⁸⁰ Despite key differences, it is not difficult to see why the Waldensians were attracted to the Reformers. The three founding pillars of reformist theology - justification by faith alone (*sola fide*); the priesthood of all believers (by which every person was entitled to examine the holy scriptures for himself); and the infallibility of the Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) – were not so far removed from the original inspiration of Valdès. Indeed, the latter two points were an exact echo of Valdès’ ideology, and were solidly in keeping with the tradition of Waldensian thought and practice.⁸¹ This observation alone challenges historians who insist that the advent of the Waldensian alliance with the Reformation was a rupture with the past.

We cannot discount the enormous appeal a successful anti-Catholic movement would have held. Instead of facing a crushing defeat or quietly disappearing, the Reformers stood firmly and proudly for their beliefs, and they had been victorious in several states. This evangelical victory must have resounded with Waldensians.

The 1530 Morel-Masson report is the most precious document we have in terms of opening a window into the world of the Waldensians. This document is a report of the communication between Georges Morel and Pierre Masson, two Waldensian *barbes*, and the illustrious Reformers they visited on their journey across the continent. The Waldensians’ first contact with Luther was in 1523, and soon they sent an embassy comprised of the two *barbes* to the Reformers Martin Bucer and John Oecolampadius, who answered their

⁸⁰ The 1523 letters between Luther and the Waldensians demonstrate a lack of confidence on the Waldensians’ part in their religious righteousness. Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 160-164.

⁸¹ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 162.

questions and guided them towards conversion.⁸² The report opens the debate on whether the Waldensians had read and interpreted (or not) the word of God correctly, and outlines the Waldensian religious movement for the Reformers, and opens a discussion about tenets of Waldensianism that the *barbes* were no longer sure of.⁸³ In terms of doctrine and theology, it is invaluable. It is also, however, entirely useful in examining the discourse the Waldensians promoted in their attempt to depict themselves. The report notes that the Waldensians typically claimed they originated with the apostles, while Morel himself thought he could date their beginnings to at least 400 years prior to his chronicle.⁸⁴ Morel (who actually drafted the entire report following Masson's unfortunate capture on their return home) painted the Waldensians in the tradition we have come to identify as trademark: he was "conscient d'appartenir au peuple des croyants qui, depuis quatre cent ans au moins, par une grâce spéciale du Christ, a joui d'une remarquable liberté intérieure malgré tant de vexations; respectueux du legs ancestral sans succomber à la tentation de suffisance; très sincère dans ses doutes, très ouvert aussi au message des réformateurs interprètes des Ecritures..."⁸⁵ Morel presented the Waldensians by describing their lifestyle as well as their doctrine, again reinforcing the idea of a social aspect to the religious community. The population, he says, was "en bonne partie simple, rustique et gagne son pain dans l'agriculture."⁸⁶ The *barbes* survived on charity from their brethren, denoting their long-term commitment to poverty. "Our food and clothes we wear...are given to us freely, as alms from the people whom we

⁸² *Ibid.*, 164.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 213. From Dublin, Trinity College, MS 259, 1.

⁸⁵ In Gonnert and Molnar, *Vaudois*, 299.

⁸⁶ Valdo Vinay, *La confessioni di fede dei valdese riformati* (Torino, Claudiana, 1975), 42, in Gabriel Audisio, *Les vaudois du Luberon: une minorité en Provence, 1460-1560* (Merindol: Association d'Etudes Vaudoises et Historiques du Luberon, 1984), 114.

teach...All our temporal goods...we ministers share this amongst ourselves. The living, and often those who are at the article of death, offer us a lot of money and other goods.”⁸⁷

Morel’s report accentuated the moral and puritanical character of the Waldensians. The *barbes* preached the same kind of strict moral purity as they had done at the outset of the movement, and as they would later. He stressed the oral quality of their culture – Scripture was learned by rote and preaching was done face-to-face.⁸⁸

Of particular note, Morel’s writing made explicit the Waldensians’ rejection of Catholicism. According to Morel, they usually pray seven times daily just like the seven Catholic Hours. However, he makes great pains to distance himself and the Waldensians from that tradition: “And in truth, we do not pray thus out of superstition or from vain faith, or to respect a given time: we are driven by the glory of God and the usefulness of the soul.”⁸⁹ Similarly, Morel rationalized their quasi-Nicodemism⁹⁰ as protection from persecution, but also cites it as a rational stance against the Church:

It is not we who administer the signs of the sacrament to our people: it is the members of the Antichrist. Yet we explain to them the spiritual meaning of the sacraments as much as we can and we exhort them not to trust in any way in the antichristian meetings and to pray that they might not be deemed to be in sin when they find themselves obliged to hear and see the abominations of the Antichrist; that an abomination of this sort should soon be confounded, that truth may come in its place and that the Word of God may come to pass.⁹¹

This pride in the Waldensian ability to replace the Church as arbiters of faith only comes into question when Morel addresses a series of theological questions to the Reformers.

Interestingly, Morel’s description of the *barbes*’ lifestyle and the lives of their brethren

⁸⁷ Vinay, *Confessioni*, 38-39, in Audisio, *Preachers by Night*, 123.

⁸⁸ Vinay, *Confessioni*, 36-37, in Audisio, *Preachers by Night*, 101.

⁸⁹ Vinay, *Confessioni*, 38-39, in Audisio, *Preachers by Night*, 125.

⁹⁰ ‘Nicodemite’ denotes a secret adherent; the term can be applied to people who intentionally misrepresent their actual religious beliefs in order to protect themselves and to conform to societal norms. The term stems from the story of Nicodemus, a secret Christian who posed as a Jew to continue living in his community.

⁹¹ Vinay, *Confessioni*, 42-43, from Audisio, *Preachers*, 130.

comes as a given. He supplied the Reformers with information, but did not really open a discussion. On doctrinal issues and ethical and conscientious issues, however, Morel opened a conversation, denoting his willingness to adapt. This implies an attachment more to a lifestyle than a particular theology or doctrine.⁹² The traditional Waldensian value of access to Scripture and religious texts was perpetuated by Morel's report. While the initial correspondence took place in Latin, Morel translated the document into the *langue d'oc* so that all the *barbes* could understand and pass the message along to the people.⁹³ The report signifies a strong tradition of community, and a willingness to adapt to situational exigencies in order to survive. An alteration of doctrine appears to have been seen, with some exception, as a reasonable price to pay for the continuation of a community bound together by history.⁹⁴

The absorption, if we can call it that, of Waldensianism into the Reformation began its long process in 1532. In most respects, the Waldensians completely adopted the Reformers' doctrines and ideals, conforming most closely to Calvinism, but they did find a compromise on several points. They fully embraced predestination ('All those who have been and will be saved were pre-elected before the creation of the world'; 'those chosen to be saved cannot fail to be saved...He who establishes free will entirely denies predestination and divine grace.'⁹⁵), abandoned confession, mass, and the seven sacraments in favour of the two (baptism and the Eucharist), permitted oaths and the ownership of private property by ministers, and allowed marriage for all. They certainly abandoned some original tenets, but on the other hand, they preserved an essential core of religious – if not theological -

⁹² Cameron, *Waldenses*, 234.

⁹³ Audisio, *Preachers*, 149.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁹⁵ Chanforan Declaration, quoted in Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 172.

convictions.⁹⁶ These abandonments were radical doctrinal changes that more or less aligned the Waldensians with Calvinism, but the central conviction of the Waldensians – that they had protected the True Church since such a time when the Catholic Church could no longer do so - remained intact. Some ancestral customs, most religious in their essence, also carried over. For example, the tradition of giving bread to the poor after a burial service was confirmed as a licit reformed custom.⁹⁷

The truth is that their emergence from clandestinity altered their movement just as equally as their descent into secrecy. Clandestinity had become, just as open preaching had been before, an intrinsic part of the movement for several hundred years, and the rejection of this concealment meant a complete reversal of the religious experience as they knew it. The ability to express their faith in public also took them directly back to the days of Valdès when public preaching constituted the basis of the movement (though not everyone preached as in Valdès' days). So, while they abandoned the immediate past, they embraced one of the most important original ideals of Waldensianism. Can we thus claim a measure of continuity for the Piedmontese Waldensians through the Reformation? Certainly not on the basis of strictly theological and doctrinal practice, but on the level of discourse and socio-cultural religion there is some basis to challenge the prevailing historiographical opinion.

One immediate outcome of the convergence of the Reformers and the Waldensians was the commissioning of a Bible in the vernacular. Published in 1535, this enormous project, commonly known as the Olivétan Bible, corresponds with the early Waldensian belief that everyone should be able to read (or at least have access to) the scriptures.⁹⁸ The production of a vernacular Bible encouraged open profession of religion, and more

⁹⁶ See Appendix F for a full record of the decisions of the Chanforan Synod of 1532.

⁹⁷ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 181.

⁹⁸ Giorgio Tourn, *Les Vaudois* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2001), 15.

importantly, community gatherings to read and interpret the Bible. This harks back to the public preaching advocated early in the movement's history, and fostered a sense of community. While a sense of community had in all likelihood been the sustaining factor of Waldensianism during the previous centuries, never before had people been able to express this kinship in public. Instead of the *barbes* being forced to wander in constant peril, they could now settle down and preach openly; this openness was the primary mission of Valdès. In some ways, it was a radical alteration of tradition, but in others it was a return to the most ancient Waldensian tradition.

The changes initiated by the 1532 synod were far-reaching, but they were not immediate. There were many people who objected to the changes, including two *barbes* who left in protest at the acceptance of the reformers' ideas.⁹⁹ This was not an instant transformation - changes began to take hold over the next few decades. By the 1560s the Waldensians were mostly conforming to Reformation doctrines, or at least the leaders were. Indicators of change began to formally take hold around this time, and churches became permanent fixtures in the valleys.¹⁰⁰ Most Waldensian historians argue that thirty years is too short a period of time to witness an evolution, and therefore it must constitute a fracture. As Audisio notes, "thirty years may be long in terms of one person's life but set within the context of a movement dating back over the centuries, it is only a brief span. From this point of view, it is more fitting to speak of a break with the past rather than an evolution, particularly since the changes were so great, and the matters being renounced of such

⁹⁹ Daniel de Valence and Jean de Molines subsequently journeyed to Bohemia, where the brethren sent a letter of reproach to Piedmont, 'urging the Waldenses not to accept too easily the doctrines of those whose reform was only just begun.' Cameron, *Reformation of the Heretics*, 132-3.

¹⁰⁰ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 186-187.

consequence.”¹⁰¹ Quite apart from the evidence of earlier change and rupture discussed above, this conclusion is objectionable as a denial of human agency.¹⁰² While thirty years is not long in the grand scheme of things, for individual observers and people who were experiencing the changes, it is a long period of time. Generational evolution is not something historians should discount; people born thirty years apart often live life with completely different attitudes, as their religious experience becomes individualized.¹⁰³ Thirty years is long enough for a generation to completely revise the way they see the world, and thirty years is certainly more than long enough to modify the collective mentality of a population, especially in the face of many (dis)continuities in their world.

It is a simpler task than one might imagine to forget or to alter one’s view of the immediate past, but this does not equate with a loss of identity and a clean rebirth. As the Reformation gradually took hold in the Waldensian valleys, people slowly adapted to the new religious practices, and forgot the old ways. As the older generation began to be replaced by children who had been raised more deeply immersed in Reformist thought, it is easy to see how they believed they were following the beliefs and traditions of their parents.¹⁰⁴ People adapt to stereotypes of identity, and follow the influence of the powerful

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.* The matters Audisio described as ‘of such consequence’ are those that underwent a reversal from the previous practices honoured by the Poor of Lyons: “Oaths are admitted; ministers are accorded the right to have private property; confession is rejected as are other pious practices such as prayers at set hours, prayers recited aloud, fasting on set days, the laying on of hands, kneeling and covering one’s head. Establishing a virginal order is declared a ‘diabolical doctrine’; marriage is forbidden to no-one; ministers of the Word are not to be transferred from one place to another.” Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 173. See also Appendix F.

¹⁰² ‘Human agency’ as I define it here means that I am emphasizing rather than discounting the human experience and personal motivation. Many historians view the evolution of Waldensianism without taking into account psychological aspects, and this discounts the importance of human action, beliefs, and strengths in shaping the outcome of a situation rather than relying only on time to impose changes. Human agency recognizes the capacity for people to exert power and influence their own perception and beliefs rather than latterly imposed perceptions.

¹⁰³ Ad Boorsboom and Frans Jaspers, *Identity and Religion* (Saarbrücken: Verlag für Entwicklungspolitik Saarbrücken GmbH, 2003), 5.

¹⁰⁴ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 187.

(in this case, the older generation).¹⁰⁵ The adherents to Waldensianism may not have realized just how transformative adopting the reformist position had been; this points to a lack of apparent change in actual religious sensibility, and is symptomatic of the ambiguity of pre-Reformation Waldensianism. It is also an indication of a strong sense of communal identity. What the Waldensians kept solidly alive throughout the period of change was their own concrete, ancient identity.

The Piedmontese Waldensian situation became increasingly remarkable as the Reformation progressed. The Bohemian Brethren had long since assimilated with the Hussites, the Apulian Brothers had been wiped out, and the French Waldensians had been absorbed into the formal, national branch of Protestantism. In Piedmont, they became the only descendents of the former Waldensian diaspora to obtain official recognition as a distinct people.¹⁰⁶ When the Waldensians became ‘Protestants’, they retained considerable ethnic and social cohesiveness; they did not dissolve into the wider world of Protestantism. Indeed, throughout the existence of the Waldensians, we can trace a permanent, unyielding nucleus of thought that covers four distinct issues. On a doctrinal level, the Waldensians maintained their attachment to poverty and a rejection of purgatory; on a social level, they maintained a rural identity, a commitment to endogamy, and fostered a community of believers; on a cultural level, they were committed to professing their faith in the vernacular, had their own language (a dialect known as Alpine-Provençal Vaudois), their own books, and a network of cultural intermediaries perpetuating the spoken and written word; and, on a psychological level, they shared a history of persecution and a collective memory of

¹⁰⁵ Boorsboom and Jespers, *Identity and Religion*, 13.

¹⁰⁶ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 261.

belonging to a long-lasting minority community that they believed had access to the truth and the legitimacy of *ancienneté*.

Post-Reformation Discourse: the Waldensians encounter the Protestants

In terms of actual practice, the transition between quasi-Protestant and full-fledged Protestant was, in some ways, quite smooth. While the doctrinal ideas underwent radical changes that shook the movement's foundations, social and cultural practice fared better. Strong Catholic hostility to the Reformation often meant that despite the condescension Protestants reserved for Waldensians practicing in secret, initially the Protestant ministers who came to the Piedmontese valleys were forced to do the same. Early Protestants acted as the *barbes* did, travelling around in semi-secrecy, carrying illicit literature, preaching in secret, and teaching their people as occasion and opportunity afforded.¹⁰⁷ Once the religion was openly professed in the valleys, the Waldensians made no pretence of believing themselves united with the greater flock. They maintained their distinctive communal identity, embodied in a non-Catholic religious practice, as well as remaining strongly attached to the independence the label 'Waldensian' had accorded them.

The Waldensians were not as malleable as the Reformers believed, and clung to their traditions. The first generation of ministers sent to preach in the Piedmontese valleys soon produced what we might style a 'literature of complaint.' Scipione Lentolo, an Italian Protestant minister sent to Piedmont in 1559 to preach and instruct the new 'Protestants', found the state of affairs disappointing, and indeed landed in a very trying situation. He quickly discovered that many Waldensians in his area were 'invincibly ignorant'. Lentolo asserted that the Waldensians had suffered so many persecutions and hardships over the

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

centuries because they had committed five ‘principal sins’: “They despised the word of God; they lacked fear of God; they were not zealous for the honour of God; they did not respect their pastors; and they were avaricious and dedicated to worldly goods.”¹⁰⁸ Lentolo’s criticisms did not end there; he and his congregants were seemingly irreconcilably incompatible. He complained about their truculence as well as their lack of knowledge of their own religion. People reacted strongly (and often badly) to his critical sermons, and he was shocked by the laity’s ignorance.¹⁰⁹

Lentolo’s experience was not unique. The Waldensians in the valleys had accepted Protestantism willingly as a complement to their longstanding non-Catholic religious tradition, but they had not been converted in the traditional sense. They “had not been ‘converted’ to the specific message of Calvin and Geneva as had, say, the Huguenots of the Languedoc...they had accepted an offer of help from a new class of religious leaders who promised to lead them into a better form of religion.”¹¹⁰ When the Protestant ministers arrived from their urbane universities to the rural villages of Piedmont, they found not only their situation much changed, but their traditional authority challenged as well. The Waldensians were not meek followers but a proud people obstinately clinging to their own religious identity instead of willingly being subsumed by another.

Lentolo found the Waldensians reluctant to attend church more than once a week, and even then sometimes resented that; this again speaks to the notion that they identified more with a sociological commonality than a strictly dogmatic one. Similarly, the minister Cosme Brevin resorted to stand-up comedy in order to entice his congregation to attend services.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁸ Scipione Lentolo, Bodleian Library, MS Barlow 8, 473-5, 482-3, 491-511. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 282.

¹⁰⁹ Scipione Lentolo, MS Barlow 8, 495. In Cameron, *Waldenses*, 283.

¹¹⁰ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 281.

¹¹¹ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 281.

Cameron begrudgingly agrees, noting that “the identity of Waldensianism, then, may be sought more in the shared purpose, attitudes and beliefs of the movement.”¹¹² While Cameron does agree on a cultural continuity for the Waldensians, he is adamant in his belief that this did not constitute religious continuity in any sense. Theology (and, in this case, a continuance of theology) must be present for Cameron to consider the Waldensian religion post-1532 a direct continuation of the Poor of Lyons.

Despite their difficulties in adapting, the Waldensians did seek to align with Reformation trends. The newly ‘Protestant’ Waldensians took up the trend of writing ‘confessions of faith’ like the 1530 Confession of Augsburg. In 1533, Waldensians in Cabrières-d’Avignon in the Comtat Venaissin wrote their own version of a confession of faith and sent it to the inquisitor Jean de Roma. They wrote to him to tell him that they were good Christians, and sent as confirmation “the faith and belief that we hold and believe in, a confession which must not be made through violence or torture but in freedom of spirit according to the faith that God gave by his grace to each of us.”¹¹³ The ensuing text was, quite simply, the Apostle’s Creed, in French, transcribed in full.¹¹⁴ It is remarkable that when the Waldensians felt compelled to make their faith public, they did so by reaching back to their roots rather than developing a completely new philosophy. This departed radically from the Protestant model of confessions of faith.

On March 23, 1556, the Parliament of Turin directed that the inhabitants of Piedmont must live and worship according to Catholic rites. The Waldensian inhabitants replied with a conciliatory but nonetheless resolute confession of faith, demonstrating their self-definition

¹¹² Ibid., 298.

¹¹³ Audisio, *Preachers*, 227. Paris National Archives, J 851 n.2, fo.30; edited by A.-L. Herminjard, *Correspondance des réformateurs dans les pays de langue française*, Genève-Paris, 1866-1897, 9 vol., reprints Nieuwkoop/B. de Graaf, 9 vol., 1965-1966, v. 7, 466-468.

¹¹⁴ The Apostle’s Creed had been one of the most important documents in the Waldensian movement since Valdès. The Creed is an early Christian theological understanding of the Canonical Gospels.

against Catholicism.¹¹⁵ These ‘confessions of faith’ were all the more interesting, according to Audisio, because the Waldensians had never made their faith public before. This, however, is incorrect. The very founder of Waldensianism had made a confession of faith, as had Durand de Huesca and Bernard Prim, two influential early adherents.¹¹⁶ In undertaking to produce these documents, the Waldensians were not just partaking in a trend, but also following a tradition. Their discourse certainly followed the traditional pattern of legitimizing their existence and their right to profess their ancient religion.

Conclusion: Giving Priority to Socio-cultural over Theological Continuity

Arguing for the ‘death’ of Waldensianism as it encountered the Reformation ignores both the evidence of a more gradual evolution and the human agency of religious belief. There are many indicators against the continuity of Waldensianism, but there are equally many reasons to consider the validity of the claim. Certainly the turmoil and confusion of the early Reformation period allowed the Waldensians to emerge from their clandestine existence into the newly complicated religious environment, and the 1532 synod resulted in a deliberate and unambiguous modification of their religious practices to correspond with those of the Reformed Religion (Genevan Calvinism, in this case). This decision does mark a definitive change from the Waldensianism of the Middle Ages and allows modern historians to speak of the ‘death’ of the Waldensian movement and the emergence of an entirely new religion.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁵ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 272.

¹¹⁶ Gonnet and Molnar, *Vaudois*, 56. These appeared in 1208 and 1210.

¹¹⁷ See Peter Biller, Gabriel Audisio, Euan Cameron, Giovanni Gonnet, Christine Thouzellier, etc.

However, it can be argued that the death of the original form of Waldensianism occurred centuries earlier, when the community was forced underground post-excommunication. This forced the community to shift not only their practices, but also their very religious foundation. If the three pillars of Valdès' religion were preaching, itinerant poverty, and the personal study of the Gospel, only one of the pillars survived undamaged until the Reformation, and indeed this remained preserved throughout the transformation. Preaching and mendicant poverty had long fallen out of the repertoire of the Waldensians by the sixteenth century, but the Reformation ideal of *sola scriptura* did not appear without warning for the Waldensians; indeed it was an enduring part of the tradition.

Alternatively, one could argue that Waldensianism never, in fact, died, as its adherents (specifically in Piedmont) continued to believe in that faith, practiced a set of principles they ascribed to that name, and labeled themselves devout followers of that religion. The idea of faith as more important than the contents of that faith is certainly relevant here; belief became the building block of the continuity myth. While theological differences certainly played a role in shaping the Waldensian community, the very fact that they could adopt a largely new religious practice and yet maintain their identity suggests that they identified more with the socio-cultural aspects of their movement than exclusively with the religious practices themselves; centuries of defining themselves *against* the Catholic Church remained more important than the specifics of how they defined this adversity. Indeed, after centuries of exclusion and persecution, it was perhaps that experience which defined them more than their theological doctrines, *per se*.

True, religious practices had changed drastically since the movement's inception, but can one not make a comparison to the counter-reformation of the Catholic Church which

altered that ecclesiastical body as well? Should we speak of the death of religion in the modern era simply because humanity interprets and practices our various religions in thousands of different permutations and combinations? One might likewise compare the Waldensians' history of struggle to that of the Jews – centuries of persecution have led to an identity based largely in tradition and culture rather than simply on theological doctrine. Indeed, the Waldensians' survival of a series of massacres creates another parallel with the formation of Jewish identity, defined often by the collective memory of surviving such atrocities as the Inquisition, the *Reconquista* and the Holocaust rather than on a strict set of religious practices.

In light of this discussion, this historian is inclined to argue *for* the continuity that so many historians have argued against. The historical evidence as exhibited above points to a deep belief by the Waldensians themselves in a continuity of faith, practice and tradition. This signifies more than any actual change in theology or doctrine. To ask one of the thousands who were willing to die for their cause if they were truly a 'Waldensian' or merely a pretender would surely serve to elicit no response but offence and indignation. Just as doctrine creates belief, so do cultural aspects of religion, and the creation of belief through those avenues is no less valid than that of the former. Regardless of the actual modification of religious practice (which was indisputably considerably altered), the socio-cultural tradition of Waldensianism retained its vitality and evolved to create a new Waldensianism that is no less deserving of that title than the religion that evolved from the Poor of Lyons, for as they demonstrated convincingly in their discourse, they believed that they professed the truth of Waldensianism. Is it not belief that sustains religion?

CHAPTER THREE: (ENGLISH) PROTESTANT SYMPATHY AND THE IMPORTANCE OF CONTINUITY

“The people of England, it is generally observed, are, of all nations in the world, the most addicted to Politics. The fact is certain, and the reason of it evident.”¹

“The preaching of sermons is speaking to a few of mankind. Printing books is talking to the whole world.” – Daniel Defoe

Having established that the Waldensians’ belief in continuity is important quite apart from whether or not the religion was continuous, we can now examine why this would have been important to other Protestants, focusing particularly on the English context. In seventeenth century England, favourable political, social, and religious conditions led to an interest in the Waldensians and their welfare, and the Waldensian continuity argument helped English Protestants strengthen the legitimacy of their position. The Long Reformation in England had slowly transformed the nation from Catholic to Anglican to Puritan and back. In doing so, the English sought to provide justification for their past ‘errors’ and to rationalize where their faith had been hiding since Catholicism corrupted Jesus’ message. In examining the documents produced by Protestants, both English and continental, as well as by the Waldensians themselves, we can begin to understand the importance of the group in the wider Protestant world.

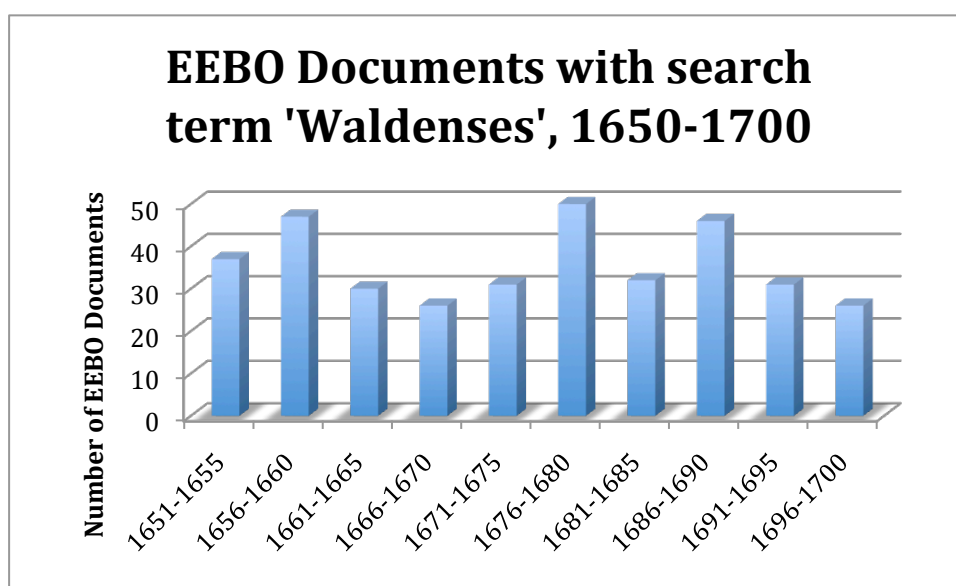
The Socio-Cultural Context of Document Production: The Creation of a Pamphlet Culture

When the Waldensian situation became critical at various points in the seventeenth century, the English were among the most vocal in their response. In the mid-seventeenth

¹ Quoted from an advertisement for ‘The Political Register,’ printed at the end of John Wilkes’ ‘A Letter to his Grace the Duke of Grafton,’ London, 1767. In John Richetti, ed., *The Cambridge History of English Literature, 1660-1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 549.

century, socio-political circumstances in England gave the population ulterior motive, and were important in driving the English to identify with the Waldensians as well as allowing the group's promotion in both popular culture and literature. The breakdown of the traditional monarchical structure of medieval England changed the face of Protestantism and public culture in England, with the Waldensians acquiring a new importance in the Puritan era that carried over even after the Restoration. The emergence of print and pamphlet culture in England at the time was an important factor in amplifying the role of the Waldensians in the development of both English and continental Protestantism and ultimately in diplomatic interventions that assisted the Waldensians in surviving.

As suggested in the accompanying graphic, written documents produced in England on the topic of the Waldensians reached their highest numbers during three periods: following the massacre of 1655, during the exclusion crisis of 1678-81, and between 1686 and 1690 when they were massacred, when both the Glorious Revolution and *la Glorieuse Rentrée* took place. The documents are varied in their size and topic, but all deal with the Waldensians in a positive manner.



The numbers in the above graph demonstrate a conspicuous interest in the Waldensians at certain junctures: when the group was in trouble, or when English Protestantism was in trouble. Before turning to the specific reasons for this outburst of pro-Waldensian publications, it is of value to examine the context of production, including social, cultural, and political circumstances that allowed mass publication.

After the overthrow of Charles I, the overwhelmingly Protestant population of England wielded an unprecedented potential to manipulate political decisions. An unfavourable pronouncement or action by those in power could be called into question on the public record as a king's decree could not. Indeed, public opinion was becoming increasingly important, and the increasingly literate and educated public began to realize they could use this to their advantage.

Perhaps because people saw the potential to change the status quo, or even their social status, there was a rising interest in writing pamphlets, tracts, polemics and histories in the seventeenth century. In particular, and unsurprisingly, there was an explosion of writing, predominantly of pamphlets and political documents, during the Civil War era and into the Protectorate.² With the religious and political future of England hanging in the balance, pamphleteering became “a cultural phenomenon... an increasingly important part of religious controversy and of the political process, which reflects appreciation of the extent to which politics took place outside Parliament.”³

With the Civil Wars of the 1640s, many traditional censorial structures broke down. The Court of Star Chamber was abolished in 1641, leaving the print industry “virtually without legal regulation,” and the Register of the Worshipful Company of Stationers could

² Thomas N. Corns, *A History of Seventeenth-Century English Literature* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2007), 230.

³ Jason Peacey, *Politicians and Pamphleteers* (Aldershot and Burlington: Ashgate, 2004), 15.

not possibly hope to keep the explosion of printing in check.⁴ Indeed, in 1641, “England experienced a culture shock – an explosion of small cheap books and broadsides reporting, commenting upon, and manipulating public events. That pamphlet culture waxed and waned until the Restoration, by turns more and less seductive.”⁵ After the Restoration, there was an increase in disposable income, and a corresponding rise in demand for luxury goods, including books and print.⁶ A new wave of pamphleteering occurred in the 1670s and 1680s, albeit without the unrestricted freedom the Civil War era had offered: a new Licensing Act took effect in accordance with the new desire for orthodoxy and peace.⁷

England’s early acceptance – promotion, even – of a vernacular Bible and the Book of Common Prayer, along with grammars and primers that fostered lay reading, had allowed for an expansion of the literacy rate as the population grew hungry for reading material.⁸ The growth of pamphlets and pamphleteering was “caused by economic factors within the book trade, by an emerging sense of literary vocation, by longer-term trends in literacy, by a crisis within the Elizabethan church, by urbanization, and perhaps by that most ever-present of historical causes, an increasing awareness of social conflict and difference.”⁹ By the 1580s, the early stigma associated with printed works began to dissipate, and by the mid-seventeenth century, pamphlets and treatises were not only popular, but indeed became requisite in creating and sustaining public support for causes and ideas. By the Glorious

⁴ Corns, *English Literature*, 243, and Nigel Wheale, *Writing and Society: Literacy, Print and Politics in Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), 66.

⁵ Jennifer Anderson and Elizabeth Sauer, eds. *Books and Readers in Early Modern England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 201.

⁶ James Raven, ‘Publishing and Bookselling 1660-1780’, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. John Richetti (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 13.

⁷ Anderson and Sauer, *Books and Readers*, 211.

⁸ Elizabeth Eisenstein, *The Printing Press as an Agent of Change: Volume I* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1979), 349-50.

⁹ Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 25.

Revolution, “it was self-evident that any attempt to generate public support for a political initiative, party or position, would have to exploit the persuasive powers of the press.”¹⁰

Print culture in the mid- to late-seventeenth century became a popular phenomenon, encompassing both the traditional ‘popular’ audience as well as the elite, marking what Tessa Watt calls a ‘cultural homogeneity’ that cut across class lines to reach the widest audience yet.¹¹ In an era of increasing literacy, and in a country where the dominant religion placed much emphasis on words and reading, literary publications began to hold a new popular importance.

What is surprising to note is the length of the majority of documents produced regarding the Waldensians. The cheapest print (which reached the widest market) was the shortest: “In this period up to 75% of the cost came from the paper, so the shortest works were the cheapest works: the one-page broadside and the tiny octavo chapbook.”¹² However, the majority of important histories and pamphlets concerning the Waldensians are quite long, some reaching lengths of three or four hundred pages. Were they, then, primarily aimed at elite audiences? The records we have now tend toward lengthy accounts aimed at highly literate and erudite people. The size of the histories of the Waldensians indicates a preference for an educated audience with leisure time enough to read and absorb the enormous volumes. As we will discuss below, the English were chiefly concerned with promoting the Waldensians in order to bolster their own legitimacy, and thus the primary audience would have been those influential men (and perhaps women) who held high-ranking societal and political positions, not only in England but abroad as well. These people belonged to the highest, most literate classes of society, and the length of the histories and treatises indicates

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 25, 57.

¹¹ Tessa Watt, *Cheap Print and Popular Piety* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 2.

¹² *Ibid.*, 1.

a willful separation from the masses. Indeed, when the goal was to elicit sympathy and subsequent monetary aid, this was the population subsection to reach.

That being said, there were a number of very long books in this era that became ‘bestsellers’ and reached a huge audience through both reading and the oral culture that was still prevalent.¹³ Additionally, it is entirely possible that single page broadsides littered the streets of London at the time but have not been preserved; the survival rates of the cheapest works such as broadsides and chapbooks are extremely low.¹⁴ This is not to say that popular publications are unrepresented in the historical record; there are certainly a number of evocative and melodramatic one- and two-page pamphlets depicting the trials and tribulations of the Waldensians.

The Waldensians did not produce as spectacular a body of writing about themselves as the English did. Of course, there were many factors playing into this, the most important being the sheer number of English versus Waldensians. The Waldensians were a pastoral group, and had far less access to both printers and sympathetic audiences, and did not confer as much importance as the English on written documents, probably in part related to a fairly low literacy rate (although there is some conjecture that the Waldensians may actually have had a relatively high literacy rate for the time).¹⁵ Additionally, they were a persecuted minority, and promoting their own agenda in the lands where they were oppressed was not only difficult but dangerous as well. A heavy history of oral over written tradition certainly added to this. Despite the relative paucity of sources written by Waldensians, they

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 258.

¹⁵ Peter Biller and Anne Hudson, *Heresy and Literacy, 1000-1530* (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

nonetheless championed their cause vocally (or as it were, literarily) and sought to educate their compatriots as well as to beg succor and sympathy.

Pieces on religion and history dominated the English market, and continental theology in particular occupied a crucial place in the publishing market.¹⁶ Interest in the goings-on on the continent and the consequent mass production in England of books on those subjects can be traced to the linguistic isolation of England in the seventeenth century. The English language was largely limited to the British Isles, and literary export and import was thus relatively minimal.¹⁷ Since there were few printers producing English texts on the continent, the shops in London had to translate and reproduce the texts to fulfill the growing demand for information. The demand for religious and socio-historical religious publishing can be attributed to the fact that seventeenth century English society and culture “was essentially religious in its institutions, practices and beliefs, and that writing on religious subjects dominated the publishing market.”¹⁸

People in England experienced international political struggles intellectually and vicariously through reading, so events happening farther away might, for some, have just as much impact as events happening in their own lands. Since political, religious, and dynastic events in Europe had a considerable impact on England, interest in continental affairs was logical.¹⁹ Watt notes that printed works “were bought for entertainment, or to satisfy needs which the reader might not necessarily have defined as ‘religious’: the need for role models, for inspirational stories, for behavioural rules to give to their children.”²⁰ The stories from

¹⁶ Pettegree, *Book World*, 289.

¹⁷ D.F. McKenzie, David McKitterick, and I.R. Willison, eds. *The Cambridge History of the Book in Britain*, vol. IV 1557-1695 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 735.

¹⁸ Isabel River, ‘Religion and Literature’, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. John Richetti, 445.

¹⁹ Anderson and Sauer, *Books and Readers*, 217.

²⁰ Watt, *Cheap Print*, 8.

across the channel brought more than just the catechism or prayer that was readily available in England; they brought political intrigue, religious controversy, and new perspectives on the world.

Pamphleteering emerged as a cultural phenomenon, and held an increasingly important place in religious debates and in the political process, reflecting the extent to which politics took place outside of Parliament.²¹ Between 1668 and 1709, eight percent of all publications in London were histories, indicating a particular interest in discovering the past as a means of understanding the present.²² While the historical chronicle had fallen out of favour with the rise of humanism, “from the carcass of the chronicle there emerged many other, complementary forms of historical work: poems, plays, antiquarian tracts, humanist ‘politic histories’... connected more directly with religious concerns.”²³ The idea of history and its immediate aftermath fascinated the English, and for good reason:

Historical writing occupied a central place in British culture throughout this period, and its prestige was, if anything, enhanced rather than diminished by its unprecedented commercial success. By the later part of the century, the genre... of history was widely recommended to readers of all ages and both sexes as a source of political instruction, moral insight, social awareness and imaginative diversion. History was regarded, without qualification, as a branch of literature. This is not to say that the writers or readers of history were unaware of or indifferent to the boundary between fact and fiction; simply that they did not feel that the artistic crafting of narrative was fundamentally at odds with its presentation of historical truth.²⁴

English authors understood history and religion in a larger human and cultural context, and strove to present their verisimilitudes to an eager audience. The particular interest shown in the history of the Waldensians reflects an interest among English readers in what they considered to be their own Protestant history, as well as a shared history of persecution, a

²¹ Peacey, *Pamphleteers*, 15.

²² Richetti, ed, *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, 16.

²³ Daniel R. Woolf, *Reading History in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 8.

²⁴ Karen O’Brien, ‘History and literature 1660-1780’, in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, ed. John Richetti, 365.

logical point of interest for a literate community. We must also take into account the severely limited ability of a persecuted rural population to publish their own works, and in most instances printers in Geneva, Leiden and London filled the void for the Waldensians.

Given the circumstances in England and on the continent surrounding the two massacres and their consequences, it is not surprising that the written response was abundant. Indeed, the impetus behind the efflorescence of publications in the mid- and late-seventeenth century is easy to understand. Waldensians and Protestants alike sought to substantiate the link between the two groups. Protestants used the Waldensians to legitimize an ancient and continuous identity; Waldensians used the attention as a means of justifying their resistance and of reifying their connection with influential Protestants across the continent.

Substantiating the Link between Waldensians and Protestants: Creating Legitimacy for Protestantism through *Ancienneté* and Continuity

By the seventeenth century, the English national identity was intrinsically bound to a Protestant identity. After years of Catholic-Protestant power struggles, and the eventual victory of Protestantism through what would come to be known as ‘the Long Reformation’, religious issues pervaded the consciousness of the English population.²⁵ Indeed, on January 29, 1689, the Convention assembled in London unanimously passed a resolution: ‘it hath been found by experience, to be inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant Kingdom to be governed by a Popish Prince.’²⁶ This seemingly simple statement announced an unequivocal recognition of the essential Protestant nature of England. Through the

²⁵ Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, eds., *Protestantism and National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 2.

²⁶ Journals of the House of Commons, X, 15; Journals of the House of Lords, XIV, 110, in Tony Claydon and Ian McBride, eds., *Protestantism and National Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 3.

resolution it became clear that “people of every political persuasion had accepted that their realm was something so closely bound to the reformed faith that neither its interests, nor its constitution, nor its very identity, could be conceived without reference to that religion.”²⁷ And since, according (erroneously) to their sympathizers, much of Protestant history rested upon the Waldensians, that group’s identity must similarly be intrinsically Protestant. Indeed, the Waldensians were recognized across Europe as a foundation of Protestantism, as the transmitters of unadulterated Christianity from antiquity, and as a bastion of strength and purity in times of persecution.

In the periods immediately surrounding the massacres of 1655 and 1686-1689, the production of documents defending, mythologizing, and generally relating to the Waldensians skyrocketed in London. The wealth of documents produced in England addressing the Waldensians are unanimous on one aspect: they present Waldensianism as a continuous Protestant religious tradition with roots long predating the reformations inspired by Luther. The Waldensians emerged in Protestant martyrology as the heroic and ancient possessors of the True Church throughout the centuries of Catholic reign.²⁸ The documents are clear in their presentation of a single thread of religion running from ancient times until the present, and an unmitigated belief in an unchanged purity of religion pervades the documents. This belief in the Waldensians as the preservers of the True Church through the Middle Ages gave rise to the group’s popularity, and resulted in a fascination with the group that manifested in an abundant written response when the group was threatened.

²⁷ Claydon and McBride, *National Identity*, 3.

²⁸ Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 288. John Foxe began the trend, but the Waldensians were also accepted without question as martyrs even in more even-handed and secular histories, such as those by Johannes Sleiden, Henri-Lancelot de la Popelinière, Théodore-Agrippa d’Aubigné, and Jacques-Auguste de Thou. We will discuss this below.

The events of 1689 in particular received a large amount of attention in England. The English celebrated the return of Protestantism to Catholic lands, and published a vast body of works on the topic of the Waldensians and *La Glorieuse Rentrée*. The situation in England was, in some ways, analogous to that of the Waldensians, and the people were quick to make comparisons and forge links with their ‘brethren’. Given William of Orange’s hand in the beginnings of *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, we can even make explicit connections between the names of the two events: the Glorious Revolution in England led to Protestant victory over Catholics in the same way *La Glorieuse Rentrée* in Piedmont resulted in Waldensian religious freedom and the reclamation of their ‘ancestral’ lands from Catholic oppressors.²⁹

The interest shown by the English community - both political and public – in the plight of the Waldensians in Piedmont suggests that the English had some sort of intrinsic link with these strangers thousands of kilometres away. By the late seventeenth century, the Church of England had evolved through many stages of Reformation but had maintained a distinct Anglican tradition.³⁰ The rather ephemeral nature of state-led religion through the sixteenth century had resolved itself somewhat with the *via media* of the Elizabethan religious settlement, although much of the early insecurity was to be revisited in the seventeenth century with the struggles between radical Puritan and Anglican factions. “For the most part, the country adjusted itself to these successive ‘settlements’ with a resilience which historians have found remarkable.”³¹ The godly element, or the Puritan element, was dominant in 1655 with Cromwell when the massacre of the Waldensians came to pass, and

²⁹ The parallel name structure of the two events was imposed later, not at the time. The first reference to the Waldensian expedition as ‘La Glorieuse Rentrée’ occurs in Henri Arnaud’s 1710 account of the events.

³⁰ Andrew Pettegree, *The French Book and the European Book World* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2007), 276.

³¹ Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (Jonathan Cape: London, 1967), 23.

the strict 'Protestant' nature of the Waldensians undoubtedly helped procure sympathy and support.

Like the Waldensians, the English were wedded to their individuality. While both groups had undergone changes at the religious level, there were elements that carried over, most notably the pride in their identity and independence. The Church of England certainly maintained old traditions that the 'Godly' constituent abhorred as popery, but these traditions gave the English Church the individuality that its members celebrated.³² The English authorial body maintained an individuality that is reflected in the works produced on the subject of religion: the English tradition was distinct from other reformed traditions despite a close association. As historian Andrew Pettegree argues, "what was transmitted into English thought and theology was not pure Calvinism but a more variegated and attenuated 'Reformed' tradition. This is a solution which of course has the great advantage of preserving the individuality to which English writers are so firmly wedded."³³

The Waldensian Church (and it was, by this time, undoubtedly a church in its own right) exhibited a conspicuously analogous position. The transformation of the Waldensian heresy into a Protestant church post-1532 was similar to the English experience in many ways. Like the Church of England through the 1559 Elizabethan Settlement, the Waldensian Church maintained its name, identity, and heritage while adopting a set of principles and practices far - or perhaps not so far - removed from its immediate past; the continuity of identity was intrinsically important for both churches. The English religious identity was far more complicated than the Waldensian religious identity, for the English were not united in their religious tradition. Along the spectrum of the English Church, 'Godly Puritans' sneered

³² Christopher Haigh, *English Reformations* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), *passim*.

³³Pettegree, *French Book*, 283.

at ‘parish Anglicans’ and these groups were ideologically divided save for one important facet:³⁴ “They were certainly not Catholics; they were beyond the reach of Catholic priests, outside and opposed to the institutional Church of Rome.”³⁵ That antagonism to ‘popery’ was the uniting factor of the diverse religious traditions in England, all claiming membership to the Church of England. While this is a rather simplistic précis of merely one component of the enormously complicated Long Reformation in England, the pivotal point is recognizing parallels between the Church of England and the Waldensian Church as continuous and independent entities despite phenomenal change. The English recognized Waldensianism as a similarly independent Protestant religious tradition, substantiating a link between the two.

Unlike the Waldensians, Protestants in England (and indeed across Europe) were, in the seventeenth century, still carving out a place for themselves in the history of Christianity. The Waldensians, confident in their *ancienneté*, provided a model for legitimation. For Protestants, finding legitimacy for their religion was proving to be an issue: given that the Catholic faith had over 1500 years of worship, the Protestants had to find a way to give themselves a similar ancient authority. As S.J. Barnett succinctly notes, “the Reformed religion was considered to be but an invention of iniquitous religious charlatans who – in league with monarch and aristocrats - were exploiting religious credulity for material and sexual ends. Under the cover of religion, they were advancing their own political power, plundering the wealth of the church and turning their backs upon the moral code of Christianity.”³⁶ Finding ancient legitimacy for their religion in the face of such blatant

³⁴ Collinson, *Puritan Movement*, 27.

³⁵ Haigh, *Reformations*, 290.

³⁶ S.J. Barnett, “Where Was Your Church before Luther? Claims for the Antiquity of Protestantism Examined,” *Church History* 68:1 (March 1999): 14.

condemnation could only prove beneficial for the population adherent to the ‘Reformed Religion’.³⁷

The hazy beginnings of Waldensianism provided a fertile ground for mythologizing the foundations of reform, an opportunity which English and continental Protestants seized upon almost immediately. Euan Cameron notes the expediency of using the Waldensians to provide a background for Protestantism:

Everyone agreed that the prophecy of Christ, that he would be with his Church forever, could not but be true. Yet such a prophecy implied that there must be a continuous, visible succession of the Church from the time of the apostles to the present. Only the Roman Catholic Church fulfilled that prophecy. The Church of the Reformation was no older than the time of Martin Luther. How, therefore, could the reformers claim to represent the ‘True Church’?³⁸

The Waldensians were recruited to fill the vacant position. As early as John Foxe’s 1570 *Actes and Monuments* (more commonly known as the *Book of Martyrs*), Protestants were crediting the Waldensians with pioneering the foundations of reform and “in setting forth the true doctrine of Christ agaynst the errorrs of Antichrist.”³⁹ Unlike later advocates, however, Foxe did not claim that the Waldensians pre-dated their twelfth-century origins.⁴⁰ Later, popular millenarian theologians, particularly Joseph Mede, used the Waldensians in their interpretations of Revelation, making the Waldensians familiar to and loved by the English people.⁴¹

³⁷ We should note that despite the English insistence on Waldensianism as a forerunner to their own Protestantism, the dominant belief in England at this time was that the Church of England had been hiding in Wales since the early days of Christianity until Henry VIII was able to restore the Church to its autonomous existence and primitive purity. Perhaps because of this story’s imprecision and vagueness, this did not preclude the existence of other theories. Colin Kidd, *British Identities before Nationalism: Ethnicity and Nationhood in the Atlantic World, 1600-1800* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 101.

³⁸ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 286.

³⁹ John Foxe, *The Unabridged Acts and Monuments Online or TAMO* (1570 edition) (HRI Online Publications, Sheffield, 2011). Available from: <http://www.johnfoxe.org> [Accessed: 08.27.12], 310, *passim*.

⁴⁰ Barnett, ‘Where was your Church?’, 20. Foxe, *Actes and Monuments* (1570), 310.

⁴¹ A. Cameron Airhart, ‘Medieval Heretics and Cromwell’s Protectorate’, in *Medievalism in England: Studies in Medievalism IV*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 65.

The advent of the printing press allowed the Waldensians to occupy a newly important place in the religious disorder of Foxe's era. Unlike the Lollards or the Hussites who could "become no more than an abortive Reformation" without the printing press, the Waldensians subsisted long enough to see the written word elevate their status to new heights.⁴² With this status, however, there came demand for public recognition of the group's history as early reformers. Concurrent with this rose the attempt to backdate the origins of Waldensianism to provide Protestantism with an antique lineage to match – or at least compare to – that of Catholicism.⁴³ Following in Foxe's footsteps, several sixteenth and seventeenth-century reformers used the Waldensians to communicate an ancient Protestant identity far extended from its actual foundations.⁴⁴ This supposed early Protestantism was said to form the underpinning of English Protestantism, despite the tenuous links the Medieval Waldensians and the current Anglican Church shared.

Even before the Waldensians joined with the Reformed tradition, belief in ancient origins was common. The *barbe* Pierre Griot illustrated that his superiors had informed him that their people had survived in spite of hardship for "four hundred years and even, as our elders tell us, since apostolic times."⁴⁵ The emphasis placed on ancient origins continued throughout the next century, appearing in Waldensian documents throughout the period. An anonymous political pamphlet written by a member of the group certainly displays this

⁴² Eisenstein, *Printing Press*, 310.

⁴³ This was particularly the case with English authors. The Waldensians had begun this practice centuries earlier, whether out of ignorance or with intention we do not know. Some French authors did not seek to falsify the history of Valdès' foundation.

⁴⁴ See, for example, Girolamo Miolo (*Historia breve e vera de gl'afari de i Valdensi delle valle*, ed. E. Balmas, Storici Valdesi 3 (Turin: Claudiana, 1971)), Theodore Beza, (*Calvini Opera*, vol. 16, cols. 470-1; Pascal, 'Le Ambascerie', *Bollettino storico-bibliografico subalpino*, vol. 19, nos 1-3 (1914), 33-4), Jean Léger (*Histoire générale des églises évangéliques des vallées de Piémont*. Leiden: Jean le Charpentier, 1669), Thomas Delaune, Pierre Allix (*Some remarks upon the ecclesiastical history of the ancient churches of Piedmont*. London: Richard Chiswell, 1690) and their claims of Waldensianism dating from "time immemorial."

⁴⁵ Maurice Pezet, *L'épopée des Vaudois: Dauphiné, Provence, Languedoc, Piémont, Suisse* (Paris: Seghers, 1976), 105; and Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 7.

critical tenet. The legitimacy of their religious identity was, in their minds, solidified by the *ancienneté* of their claims from a time ‘out of mind’: “It is not unknown to all *Europe*, That of Time out of Mind, we and our *Ancestors* have been in the uninterrupted Possession of the aforesaid *Vallies*, and of the same Religion which we profess of this very day, without any considerable Alteration either of *Doctrine* or *Discipline*.”⁴⁶

This early evidence of belief in continuity and *ancienneté* would become more than simply a historical footnote to Protestants looking to demonstrate their ancient legitimacy. Indeed, the Waldensians’ very existence would become a matter of importance. Their continuous religion, their *ancienneté*, and their historical situation became transposed onto their image, and that image became used widely in literature and propaganda.

Even before the Piedmontese Easter, authors were seeking to justify the Waldensians as ancient Protestants and to create a link with the new Reformed traditions. The ideas of continuity and *ancienneté* formed the basis of the claims for Protestant legitimacy, adopting the Waldensians as ancestors of Protestant thought and tradition. Regardless of the strict truth of continuity, authors flocked to the idea and it found a central and lasting place in the historiography of the Waldensians, as well as in propaganda and pamphletary literature.

Jean-Paul Perrin, a minister of the Reformed Church in the Dauphiné, wrote a major apology for the Waldensians in 1618, and it was published twice in 1624 under two different titles and with small variations, but from the same publisher in London.⁴⁷ The work was translated from French by Samson Lennard, who wrote a dedication in which he neatly

⁴⁶ Anonymous, *The Declaration and manifesto of the Protestants of the Vallies of Piedmont, called the Vaudois* (London: Thomas Salusbury at the Sign of the Temple, 1690), 2.

⁴⁷ JP Perrin, *Luthers fore-runners, or, A cloud of witnesses deposing for the Protestant faith. Gathered together in the historie of the Waldenses*. London: Nathanael Newberry at the Signe of the Starre, 1624; and *The Bloudy Rage of that Great Antechrist of Rome and his superstitious adherents, against the true Church of Christ and the faithfull professors of his Gospell. Declared at large in the Historie of the Waldenses and Albigenses*, London: Nathanael Newberry at the Signe of the Starre, 1624.

explained the relationship between the English fascination with the Waldensians and their history: “The truth of which religion and visibilitie of this our Church of England, is made manifest in this history for the last foure hundred and fifty yeares: which confutes that common and triuiall obiection of the common Aduersarie, that our religion began with *Luther*.”⁴⁸ Lennard’s claim that their religion began with the Waldensians rather than with Luther was a bold statement, but one that would prove a lasting myth. While Lennard kept Perrin’s accurate dating of the Waldensians to Valdès’ time, the desperate desire for legitimacy from *ancienneté* is evident in Lennard’s attempt to conflate the Church of England with Waldensian heritage. Perrin, a minister in Nyons, a town in the Dauphiné region of France, was part of a Protestant tradition that did share a history with the Waldensians. The English link was evidently more tenuous, but Lennard’s translation and introduction attempted to strengthen and solidify that connection.

Another of the earliest voices of public support for the Waldensians came from none other than the illustrious and controversial John Milton. The Waldensians represented for Milton “primitive Christianity, uncorrupted by human modification.”⁴⁹ His earliest reference to the Waldensians occurred in a quotation in his 1649 work *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, in which he justified resistance to tyrants (the Waldensians were renowned for standing up to their Catholic oppressors and securing a modicum of religious freedom), and made explicit reference to the group as a ‘Protestant Church’.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ JP Perrin, *Luthers fore-runners, or, A cloud of witnesses deposing for the Protestant faith. Gathered together in the historie of the Waldenses* (London: Nathanael Newberry at Signe of the Starre, 1624), 3.

Perrin dedicated the book to Lord Francis de Bonne, Duke, Peer and Mareschal of France, lieutenant general for his Majesty in Dauphiné, Lord of Lesdiguières etc. Lennard dedicates his translation to the Right Honourable William, Earl of Pembroke...and one of his majesty’s Privy Council members etc.

⁴⁹ William B Hunter Jr., “Milton and the Waldensians.” *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900* 11:1 (Winter 1971): 150.

⁵⁰ John Milton, *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*. Luxon, Thomas H., ed. *The Milton Reading Room*, <http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton>, March, 2008.

He again referenced the group in *Eikonoklastes*, also published in 1649.⁵¹ Milton, according to his research, noted that “those Churches in Piemont have held the same Doctrine and Government, since the time that Constantine with his mischievous Donations poyson’d Silvester and the whole Church.”⁵² His iconic 1655 sonnet, *On the Late Massacre in Piemont*, discussed below, is possibly the only poem written in their memory, and the hagiographic language used clearly demonstrates Milton’s belief in Protestant continuity.

In England, the Waldensians began to occupy a more significant space in pamphletary culture when they were massacred in 1655. They had received a fair amount of mention prior to those events, but after the massacre their popularity and importance grew immensely.⁵³ With the bloodbath, they exploded onto the international scene, occupying a newly important place in the literature as the negotiations between factions stretched out. The most central feature of their identity as represented by the Waldensians and Protestants alike is that of continuity. Despite the recent history of changes initiated in the 1530s, Waldensians and Protestants believed in an uninterrupted continuity from the earliest days of the Poor of Lyons, if not stretching further back to the days of the Donation of Constantine or even to apostolic times. Following the 1655 massacre, this *ancienneté* and continuity was continually reinforced in the documents circulating in England, produced by Waldensians, continental Protestants and Englishmen alike; the number of documents promoting the Waldensians and their association with Protestantism rose sharply.

The two most important reactions to the massacre were documents associated with Oliver Cromwell. Giovanni Battista Stoppa’s account was published on Cromwell’s

⁵¹ Hunter, *Milton*, 150.

⁵² John Milton, *Eikonoklastes*, in Georgi Vasilev, *Heresy and the English Reformation: Bogomil-Cathar Influence on Wycliffe, Langland, Tyndale and Milton* (Jefferson, North Carolina: McFarland & Company, 2008), 122.

⁵³ See Figure 1.

command, and Samuel Morland's history was a direct product of his diplomatic interventions arranged by Cromwell; he was also employed as Clerk of the Signet while he wrote the history of the Protestants in Piedmont.⁵⁴ Morland dedicated his history to Cromwell, hoping he would "vouchsafe to own the weak endeavours for preserving the name and memory of those Ancient and Primitive Professors."⁵⁵ Stoppa and Morland sought to provide legitimacy for Protestantism by using the Waldensians' ancient origins as proof. Morland "knew not how better to serve my Generation, or succeeding ages, than in the collecting and reducing into an exact and entire History, whatsoever concerns either the Antiquity, Doctrine, Life or Persecutions of those poor *Evangelical Churches*, even from the Day of *Christ* and his *Apostles*."⁵⁶ Morland, who of all the chroniclers had the most direct contact with the Waldensians during his time as ambassador, wrote of "those Ancient and *Primitive Professors*" of Protestantism.⁵⁷ He used their excommunication as further proof of their *ancienneté*, claiming that Catholics "in plain terms avow the Antiquity of their Religion under the name of Heresie, even from the Apostles time; So that now *what need we any further witness? We have heard themselves speak*."⁵⁸ Morland went so far as to claim that "the Religion which both the poor Waldenses and we profess, has much better evidences for its truth and Antiquity, than that of our Adversaries and Antagonists. And if after all we should as boldly demand of them, as they have done to us, where was their Religion during the first six Centuries...I much fear they would be extreamply confounded."⁵⁹

⁵⁴ Peacey, *Pamphleteers*, 105.

⁵⁵ Samuel Morland, *History of the Evangelical Churches of the valleys of Piedmont* (London: Henry Hills of His Highness's printers for Adoniram Byfield, 1658), 5.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 16.

Stoppa's history altered the story of Valdès and his followers to allow for the creation of Waldensianism prior to Valdès' lifetime, thus endowing the Waldensians with an ancient identity. Apparently, Valdès and his followers had fled to the Piedmontese valleys after being persecuted in Lyons:

Finding the Natives to be of their own opinions, they compos'd together those reform'd Churches of the *Waldenses*, which have ever since subsisted: Which proves that the reformed Religion profest in those Vallies did not begin within an age or two of this, as some ignorant adversaries say, but that it hath been either from the very Apostles, or from the first ages, that the Waldenses found there the seed of the true Religion.⁶⁰

Stoppa also praised the Waldensians by framing their *ancienneté* against Catholicism. He quoted the Roman Inquisitor Reynerius' sermon lambasting them, and then used these criticisms as a foundation for Protestant legitimacy. According to Stoppa, Reynerius claimed that:

Amongst all the Sects that are in the World, there is none that hath been, or is still more pernicious than that of the *Waldenses* or *Leonistes*, for three Reasons; First, because it hath lasted longer than all others, some saying it began in *Sylvester* his time, others deriving them from the Apostles. Secondly, because it is so Universall, that there is no Countrie where it is not. Thirdly, because the Professors of it live more uprightly before men, and hold all the Articles of the Apostles Creed, blaspheming onely against the Church of *Rome* and hating it.⁶¹

Because Reynerius, a Catholic, credited the Waldensians with ancient origins, Stoppa no doubt gleefully made use of his error as accreditation.

Perrin published a second history of the Waldensians at this juncture, also praising the Waldensians for their pure and longstanding religious tradition as a forerunner to Protestantism, although Perrin is unique among the major chroniclers in that he, like Foxe,

⁶⁰ Giovanni Battista Stoppa, *A collection, or narrative, sent to His Highness, the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, & Ireland, &c. Concerning the Bloody and Barbarous Massacres, Murders, and other Cruelties, committed on many thousands of reformed, or Protestants dwelling in the Vallies of Piedmont, by the Duke of Savoy's Forces, joyned therein with the French army, and several Irish regiments* (London: H. Robinson at the Three Pigeons, 1655), 5.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

does not credit the Waldensians with apostolic origins.⁶² A fourth anonymous document dating from 1655 uses the same linguistic conventions and idiomatic phrasing as the three former documents, purporting to find in Waldensianism an ancient legitimacy. This document stresses the idea of *ancienneté* professed in the others, but also strives to promote a pan-European Protestant unity and solidarity: “Who make questions, but that those Churches, Nations, Person, and Places which have speciall Relation one unto another, Sacred or Civil, in the bonds of Religion, Neighbourhood or Commerce, are more especially bound mutually to consider and bemoan one anothers conditions: And none so prophane as to say, what is this to us, be it all be true?”⁶³

This identity as bearers of the (apparently continuous and unchanging) True Religion appears not only in times of strife as in 1655 or 1686, but also in times of relative peace, exhibiting that this belief was not merely a false measure for garnering sympathy, but a ‘truth’ held dear to the community. Jean Léger’s 1669 account proclaims the purity of the Waldensian religion and its long history of perfection, going so far as to claim that the Waldensians did not need a Reformation since their religion remained uncorrupted since the time of the Apostles:

La pure verité Evangelique, constamment conservee dans les Vallées dès le tems des Apôtres (où je prouve invinciblement qu’elle n’a jamais pû estre tellement alterée par les Traditions de Rome, qu’elle ait û besoin de Reformation)... n’est-ce pas clairement faire connoitre au monde, avec la verité de la Doctrine...aussi & son *antiquité*, & sa *succession* veritablement *Apostolique*...⁶⁴

The documents published in 1689 and the surrounding years share a common theme, similarly rhapsodizing on the ancient, pure, and continuous nature of the Waldensian

⁶² Jean-Paul Perrin, *Matchlesse crueltie declared at large in the ensuing history of the Waldenses* (London: Edward Brewster at the Crane, 1655), *passim*.

⁶³ Anonymous, *The Barbarous & inhumane proceedings against the professors of the reformed religion within the dominion of the Duke of Savoy, Aprill the 27th, 1655* (London: M.S. for Thomas Jenner, 1655), 1.

⁶⁴ Jean Léger, *Histoire générale des églises évangéliques des vallées de Piemont*. (Leiden: Jean le Charpentier, 1669), ‘Dedicace’.

religion. As Giorgio Tourn remarks, for English Protestants, the Waldensians represented a direct link with apostolic times: “Dans leur montagnes, les Vaudois représentent un témoignage vivant de l’âge apostolique, et leur fidélité chrétienne ininterrompue durant des siècles donne à la Réforme sa garantie d’authenticité historique.”⁶⁵

Among the most noteworthy of the documents proclaiming *ancienneté* and legitimacy is Pierre Allix’s monumental history of the Waldensians.⁶⁶ Allix dedicated his history to William III, praising his dedication to maintaining and promoting the Reformed Religion of his ‘Glorious Ancestors’. Allix’s defence of the ‘Ancient Churches of the Valleys of *Piedmont*’ credits them with much influence in the Reformation ‘in which those *Hero’s* of [William’s] Name, had so great a part’. Pierre Boyer’s two histories, published in 1691 and 1692, are equally sycophantic and indeed mythologize the Waldensians and their righteous Christianity even further.

... whether one consider their Perseverance in the profession of the holy doctrine of the Apostles, or one reflects upon the wars they have maintained these 200 years, to preserve amongst them the Purity of the Christian Religion; one sees so many miracles of Wisdom, Goodness, and Power of God, that it’s impossible not to confess, that God has declared himself plainly to be the God of this people, and that he is the Protector and Defender of their persons, as well as Religion.⁶⁷

Boyer went back as far as the thirteenth-century text of *La Nobla Leyczon* to rationalize his belief in an unchanged religious doctrine:

Since the Valleys of *Piemont* were enlightened with the bright Rays of the Gospel, [according to Boyer, St Paul brought the gospel to Piedmont en route to Spain] the Inhabitants of these Countries have conserved the purity of the Christian Religion

⁶⁵ Giorgio Tourn and Henri Arnaud, *Histoire de la glorieuse rentrée des Vaudois dans leurs valées* (Torino: A. Meynier, 1998), xiii.

⁶⁶ While Allix was originally French, he fled France and found refuge in London. Pierre Allix, *Some remarks upon the ecclesiastical history of the ancient churches of Piedmont*. London: Richard Chiswell, 1690.

⁶⁷ Pierre Boyer, *The history of the Vaudois: Wherein is shewn their Original; how God has preserved the Christian religion among them in its purity, from the time of the apostles, to our days; the wonders he has done for their preservation, with the signal and miraculous victories that they have gained over their enemies; how they were dispersed and their churches ruined; and how at last they were re-established, beyond the expectation and hope of all the World* (London: Edward Mory, 1692), 4.

without any mixture of humane traditions, they neither had any Images or Altars in their Churches; they never invoked the Angels or Saints, never believed in Purgatory, they never acknowledged other mediator than Jesus Christ, nor other merit than that of the Mass, of auricular Confession, of Abstinence from certain sorts of meat, of the Celibacy of Priests, of the Doctrine of Transubstantiation; they always held the H. Scriptures to be the perpetual rule of Faith, and would never receive or believe any thing, but what they taught; and their Doctrine was always the same it is now. This is proved clearly from the Acts that were preserved from the Flames that reduced their Churches and houses to Ashes, among which, there is one writ in their vulgar tongue in the Year 1100. called the *Lesson*, because it gives the rules of holy living and good works, besides a Catechism of the same Year, where in question and answer are taught the principal mysteries of the Christian Religion, according to the word of God, without any mixture of Traditions; besides an explication of the Lords prayer; in the Year 1120. and an explication of the Apostles Creed; with several passages of the H. Scripture explaining ever article; to which is joyned an explication of the ten Commandments in short; a little book entituled, *A Treatise of Antichrist*. These three Acts were made, in the Year 1120. the last of these Treatises shews. that all those are Antichrists that teach Doctrines contrary to the word of God. They confute the doctrine of Prayers for the dead, Purgatory, Auricular Confession, Abstinence from Flesh, and reject all traditions that are not in the word of God, and are not conformable to it.⁶⁸

Despite Boyer's inaccuracy on a number of these claims, the idea that the Waldensians had maintained their religion is the essential message.

Gilbert Burnet's 1688 *The history of the persecution of the valleys of Piedmont* and a corresponding collection of letters proclaimed the Waldensians' ancient importance. Burnet claimed the Waldensians were "the most ancient of all, that from the top of the alpes, had illuminated a great part of the universe."⁶⁹ He waxed poetic on their ancient nature while emphasizing their distressed state; Burnet wrote of "the sad Remains of that dismal Shipwrack, wherewith the true Successors of the Apostles have been so lately swallowed up...those Mother Churches, the most ancient of all."⁷⁰ He is vehement in his promotion of

⁶⁸ Ibid., 9-10. See Boyer, 11-13 for the full edition of the Waldensian Profession of Faith, which he dates (erroneously) to 50 years before Valdès. See also Appendix E for transcription.

⁶⁹ Gilbert Burnet, *The history of the persecution of the valleys of Piedmont* (London: Thomas Newborough at the Golden Ball, 1688), 35.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 25.

the Waldensians' *ancienneté* and on the continuity of the Waldensian religion as well as their rejection of Catholicism:

The Churches of the Valleys of *Piedmont*, or of the *Waldenses*, as they are commonly called, were the most ancient of all those that derive their Original from the Apostles, whose Doctrine they have always followed and taught. They stood in no need of a Reformation, by reason that they never were partakers of those gross Errors and Idolatries with which the Church of *Rome* and Popery have infected Christendom. The purity of their manners hath corresponded so well with their Doctrine, that their very Enemies have not stuck to avouch, That their moderation, and the exemplariness of their Lives, have contributed much to the establishment of their Religion. They have not been content only not to enter into an idolatrous and superstitious Communion, but they have always openly declared and protested against those Abuses and against the Papal Tyranny; insomuch, that neither *Luther* nor *Calvin*, nor any other of our Reformers, have pleased more strongly or boldly in confutation of the Heresies of the *Roman* Church: as also the aforesaid great Men have given their approbation of the Doctrine of the Churches of the *Waldenses*, as Orthodox and Apostolical.⁷¹

Burnet went on to point out the importance the Waldensians played in the anti-heresy campaigns of the Church, accentuating the long history of 'other' that the Waldensians have played – a heritage of exclusion and persecution. He concluded that it was no surprise that the Waldensians had “always been the object of the hatred and rage of the Papists” since their ancient and true Christianity had long been a thorn in the side of the dominance of the anti-Christ.⁷²

An anonymous treatise similarly accredits the Waldensians with ancient origins, going as far back as the Apostles. The Waldensian churches “of the Vallys of *Piemont*, or of the *Vaudoises*, as they were commonly call'd, were the ancientest of all those, who drew their original from the Apostles; whose doctrine they have ever taught and follow'd.”⁷³

Samuel D'Assigny was likewise “most certain, that they and their Religion are very

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ Anonymous, *An Account of the late persecution of the Protestants in the vallys of Piemont, by the Duke of Savoy and the French King, in the year 1686* (Oxford: John Crosley at the Theatre, 1688), 3.

ancient.”⁷⁴ The pastor and war leader Henri Arnaud corroborated this account of the Waldensians’ ancient and continuous history in his epic retelling of *la Glorieuse Rentrée*. The Waldensians, according to him, “ont depuis demeuré de pere en fils jusqu’à present dans la pureté & simplicité de leur Religion c’est à dire de l’Evangile que prechoit alors S. Paul.”⁷⁵

Arnaud reiterated his conviction in *ancienneté* with the statement that the Waldensians “ont conservé la pureté, & la simplicité du S. Evangile de tems immemorial.”⁷⁶ He goes on to say “La religion des Vaudois est aussi ancienne, que leur nom est venerable.... Qu’ils sont de tems immemorial; il ne seroit aussi difficile de faire connoître à tout le monde, que ces pauvre fideles étoient dans les valées du Piedmont, dans celle de Pragelas ou Valcluson; & dans les montagnes du haut Dauphiné, savoir du Briançonnois, et de l’Embrunois plus de trois, ou quatre cens ans avant que parussent au monde ces excélens, & extraordinaires personages, Luther, Calvin et autres Lumieres de la reformation et de l’Eglise.”⁷⁷

Not only did these documents endow the Waldensians with the honour of apostolic origins and purity, but they claimed to be certain that the Waldensians had held the Christian religion in perfection since the day it began. Many went so far as to claim that the Waldensian religion did not undergo a transformation during the Reformation, but that it was always professed in its current form, endowing the religion with ‘ancient faultlessness’. According to this theory, they “had no need of Reformation; having never partaken of the

⁷⁴ Samuel D’Assigny, *A short relation of the brave exploits of the Vaudois, and of God’s miraculous providence in their preservation in the late wars against the French in Piedmont* (Dublin: John Breus, 1699), 5.

⁷⁵ Henri Arnaud, *Histoire de la glorieuse rentrée des Vaudois dans leurs valées*, originally published 1710, ed. Georges Tourn (Torino: A. Meyer, 1988), preface.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, C4.

errors and Idolatrys wherewith the Romanists have inflected the Christian Church.”⁷⁸

D’Assigny declared that “from the time of the holy Apostles they have always been of the same Religion that they are of now.”⁷⁹ Allix asserted that the Waldensians served as “a Model to our Reformers” as they had “alwaies preserved amongst them the Sacred Truths of the Christian Religion committed to them as they had received them from the Disciples of the Apostles; and rejected the Corruptions thereof.”⁸⁰

These authors were so intent on proving continuity and *ancienneté* that they sometimes found, invented, or modified evidence demonstrating the Waldensians’ pre-Reformation doctrine. Despite records that showed medieval Waldensian beliefs and practices as quite similar to those of Catholics, Protestant writers went further than the Waldensians themselves to establish an identity of ancient (or at least pre-Reformation) legitimacy, and sought to compare and reconcile the doctrines and beliefs they professed before 1532 with those they upheld post-Reformation. In all likelihood, this probably meant they amended the documents slightly.

Allix, writing in 1690, took his evidence from numerous sources. His most repeated source is Claudius Seysselius, the Archbishop of Turin from 1518. Seysselius published his history of the Waldensians in 1520, before the Reformation had reached Piedmont, and Allix uses Seysselius’ information to justify his reasoning in a continuous religion.⁸¹ It is always possible that Allix doctored the findings he reported, but there was at this time still a ‘pamphlet war’ between Catholics and Protestants, so that any writer willing to undertake research could have easily trounced Allix’s findings were they a misinterpretation of the

⁷⁸ Anon., *An Account of the Late Persecution*, 3.

⁷⁹ D’Assigny, *A Short Relation*, 4.

⁸⁰ Pierre Allix, *Some remarks upon the Ecclesiastical History of the Ancient Churches of Piedmont* (London: Richard Chiswell, 1690), 3.

⁸¹ Claudius Seysselius, *Adversus errores et sectam Valdensium disputationes perquam eruditae ac piae*. Paris: R. Chaudière, 1520.

facts.⁸² Allix went so far as to use the writings of Seysselius to challenge Jacques-Benigne Bossuet, Bishop of Meaux, who claimed that the Waldensians had changed their religion in 1532:

The Bishop of Meaux stily maintains, That the *Waldenses* never espoused the Opinions of the Protestants, till after the Year 1532, at which time they united themselves with them against the Church of Rome. Was there ever a more obstinate piece of illusion? Claudius Seysselius, Archbishop of Turin, wrote against the Waldenses before the Year 1518. He began his Pontificate by persecuting them according to the edicts of Francis I and Charles Duke of Savoy. His Book was printed at Paris, in the Year 1520. in the first Pages of which Book he gives us an account of the Sequel of their continual Persecutions; He sets down their belief, which is almost wholly conformable to their Confession of Faith in 1532, and yet the Bishop will needs still confidently maintain, That all that Confession was only the fruit of their uniting with the Protestants.⁸³

Allix then set out Seysselius' entire catalogue of the Waldensians beliefs. Seysselius' catalogue does not demonstrate any conspicuously non-Protestant practices.⁸⁴

Allix similarly uses inquisition records to demonstrate pre-Reformation Waldensianism as similar to that of his era. One such record is the confession of Peyronette (or Peironetta), the widowed wife of a Waldensian named Peter Bernard (and presumably a Waldensian herself), in 1494. She stood trial before Anthony Fabri, Doctor of the Canon of Embrun, Inquisitor General of Heresy in the counties of Vienne, Valence, and Die, and Christopher de Sabien, Doctor of Laws, Canon, and Vicar. She resisted answering the first interrogation she underwent, but began to answer in her second and third interrogations (possibly under duress given that she underwent three interrogations).⁸⁵ She confessed that about 25 years before, two strangers had come to her house, friends of her husband, and they

⁸² Cameron, *Waldenses*, 290.

⁸³ Allix, *Some remarks*, 109-110. For the full statement of Seysselius and a catalogue of the Waldensian beliefs in 1518, see Allix, 156-157, in Appendix B.

⁸⁴ See Appendix B.

⁸⁵ Peter Biller, *The Waldenses: Between a Religious Order and a Church* (Burlington, Vermont and Aldershot, Great Britain: Ashgate, 2001), 192.

had spoken in Italian or Lombard.⁸⁶ She admitted that she had listened to their sermons and had taken their words to heart; she then catalogued for the inquisitors all the beliefs and practices she could recall the *barbes* teaching.⁸⁷ However, because of the possibility that her admissions came under duress, the testimony is unreliable. Allix ignores the possibility, presenting Peyronette's statement as verbatim. He is quite insistent that he must prove to his audience the veracity of continuity, and does not stop with these two examples. He uses two 'famous' Catholic figures to "inform us concerning the Faith and Conversation of the *Waldenses*...the one is an Inquisitor, who wrote in the XIV. Century, towards the end of it, *Who, saith he, had an exact knowledge of the Waldenses, at whose Trials we had often assisted and that is several Countries; as himself witnesseth.*"⁸⁸ This nameless (but somehow famous) inquisitor apparently acquired a great deal of his knowledge on the Waldensians from an even earlier source, Bishop Reynerius, who wrote in Lombardy around 1250. This, according to Allix, shows "that they had the same Opinions at the end of the XIV. Century, which their Ancestors had in *Lombardy* about the middle of the XIII."⁸⁹ The subsequent record of their beliefs and practices again conformed closely to many Protestant ideas.

These similarities are not only represented in Allix's tract, however. Multiple sources undertake to present evidence of corresponding principles. Boyer, Burnet, and Morland used similar tactics to prove that the Waldensians had professed a doctrine similar (if not equal) to that which they professed post-Reformation. We must acknowledge that this insistence on unchanged doctrine is less realistic than continuity based in socio-cultural factors, but for Protestants, the idea of continuous theology was crucial.

⁸⁶ Peyronette's actual interrogation took place in 1494, and she claims that about twenty-five years before she was visited by the *barbes*. Biller reports that this was in 1479, but that is only 15 years before 1494. Biller's math is erroneous, and the events must have actually taken place in 1469. Cf. Biller, *Waldenses*, 192.

⁸⁷ Allix, *Some Remarks*, 150-151. See Appendix C for transcription of Peyronette's testimony.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 117-8.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 118. For the full catalogue of beliefs, see Allix 117-121, or Appendix D.

Various other published documents run the gamut from histories to private letters to treatises and manifestos, but all have a common theme. They present the Waldensians as innocent and virtuous Christians, and vilify their Catholic persecutors: “It is not at all to be wonder’d at then, that these Churches have always been the object of hatred and rage of the Papists...that divers famous Inquisitors have at several times made use of that cruelty and subtilty that rage and malice could invent for the extermination of the Waldenses...”⁹⁰ Even the documents that present the Waldensians’ aggressive campaign to recapture their valleys paint them in the light of avenging angels or righteous defenders. Henri Arnaud, the famous Waldensian preacher and war leader, “compared them to the People of Israel, upon the Shoar of the Red Sea; promising himself from the Goodness of GOD, that would bless their Enterprize, since it only tended to his Glory...”⁹¹

The documents are striking in their use of common turns of phrases and in the information they provide. For instance, this particular quotation (with minimal variation) occurs in the introductory paragraph of multiple accounts of the Waldensians:

The Churches of the Vallys of *Piemont*, or of the *Vaudaises*, as they were commonly call’d, were the ancientest of all those, who drew their original from the Apostles; whose doctrine they have ever taught and follow’d. They had no need of Reformation; having never partaken of the errors and Idolatrys wherewith the Romanists have infected the Christian Church. The simplicity of their manners agreed so well with that of their doctrens, as has forced their Enemyes to confess; that this has especially contributed to their preservation.⁹²

This is not an isolated instance; indeed a great many of the documents produced are noticeably alike, if not in exact wording then certainly in treatment of the subject matter.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁹¹ Anonymous, *An account of the bold & daring enterprize of the Primitive Reformed, in order to Recover their Just Rights, Liberties, and Profession of their Religion in the Dutchy of Savoy* (London: Robert Clavel at the Peacock, 1689), 4.

⁹² Anonymous, *An Account of the late persecution of the Protestants in the vallys of Piemont, by the Duke of Savoy and the French King, in the year 1686* (Oxford: John Crosley at the Theatre, 1688), 3; Burnet, *History of the persecution*; Allix, *Some Remarks*; D’Assigny, *A Short Relation*, etc.

These oft-repeated axioms form the basis of the identity the English ascribed to the Waldensians, relying on *ancienneté* and continuity as legitimizing factors for Protestantism.

The Waldensians' claims to continuity were usually tied to their longstanding residence in the Piedmontese valleys. Somehow, the people had begun to conflate their *ancienneté* with their occupancy, and this became a significant aspect of their identity, again linking to the idea of socio-cultural factors as an argument for continuity. The Waldensians often argued that their presence in the valleys predated the Poor of Lyons' twelfth century origins, citing this as the reason for the name 'Waldensian' rather than Valdès. According to the post-Reformation literature, the group was not named after their eponymous founder, because that would be a physical impossibility given their claim to an origin that occurred centuries before his lifetime. Instead, they posited that the terms Waldensian/Vaudois/Vallensis stemmed from the etymology of the Latin word *vallis*, referring to the valleys wherein they made their home. They made explicit reference to Valdès as the renewer of the faith, not the founder. Henri Arnaud noted the tendency of the Waldensians' detractors to emphasize Valdès' foundation of the group and to accuse later Waldensians of inventing the claim of ancient heritage. Arnaud disparaged these accusations, instead drawing attention to the valleys, where the inhabitants "Vaudois, tyrant leur nom du mot Latin *Vallis* & non pas comme on l'a voulu insinuer de Valdo marchand de Lion....La Religion des Vaudois est aussi ancienne, que leur nom est venerable."⁹³

English and Protestant claims of ancient religion are commonly coupled with a history of longstanding residence in the Piedmontese valleys in keeping with the beliefs of the Waldensians. In recounting the events of 1686, an anonymous English author made explicit mention of this dwelling in conjunction with the residents' longevity: "thus were the

⁹³ Arnaud, *Histoire de la Glorieuse Rentrée*, preface.

Vallys of *Piemont* depopulated of their ancient Inhabitants, and the light of the Gospel extinguished in a Country, where it had shined for so many ages.”⁹⁴ Samuel D’Assigny explained their designation as coming from their homes: “the *Vaudois* are a People Inhabiting the Vallies of the *Alpes* between *France* and *Italy*: They derive their Name from *Vallis* a Valley, because they are all Vallies where they Inhabit...and not from *Peter-Waldo*, as some imagine.”⁹⁵ Pierre Allix likewise objected strongly to the idea that Valdès gave his name to the Waldensians, claiming that the truth of their identity lay in their intrinsic ties to the valleys in which they made their homes:

It is not true, that *Waldo* gave this name to the Inhabitants of the Valleys; they were called *Wallenses* or *Vaudes*, before his time, from the Valleys in which they dwelt. This we find in *P. Damian’s* Letters, who calls them *Subalpini*, that is, the same as *Waldenses*, and in *Ebrardus de Bethune*, who wrote in the year 1212, where he asserts, That they called themselves *Wallenses*, *quia in valle lacrymum manerent*, *because they abode in the Valley of Tears*: So that we see that this Etymology rather has respect to the place where they lived, which was in the Valleys of *Piedmont*, than to the name of *Peter Waldo*.⁹⁶

So certain was Allix in the Waldensians’ *ancienneté* that he blamed the Catholic Church for the charge of medieval, rather than ancient, origins. “It has pleased the Roman Party to denominate these Churches from *Waldo*,” he noted, “as if it was he who had first founded them.” He also criticized “Polemical Writers of the past and foregoing Ages, [who] have made use of this mistake by a kind of prescription against the Novelty of the Reformation.”⁹⁷

In 1686, the Waldensians reiterated their beliefs again in response to the Duke of Savoy’s edict. The assertion that the Waldensians had inviolable rights is founded both on longstanding religious traditions and on the simpler concept of right to property. The objection to the Duke’s order was made on the claim that the Waldensian identity was tied to

⁹⁴ Anon., *An Account of the Late Persecution*, 24.

⁹⁵ D’Assigny, *A Short Relation*, 4.

⁹⁶ Allix, *Some Remarks*, 95.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 99-100.

their homes in the Piedmontese valleys, and that professing their religion was a divine right which defined their community: “We, *the Inhabitants of the foresaid Vallies*, Considering that by no Laws of God, or just Constitutions of Men, we can be justly thrown out of our *Native Country*, and debarred from the Exercise of our Ancient Religion...”⁹⁸

Certainly the records produced as a reaction to the 1655 and 1686 massacres are similar in their treatment of the subject matter. The Waldensians are painted as innocent and meek against the fury of the combined French, Irish, and Savoyard armies. The depiction of guiltless Protestants facing the wrath of the Catholic troops was a microcosm of the larger struggle of England against Catholic Europe, and the population of England fed on that imagery. The content of the documents, while varying, concentrated on presenting the Waldensians in a light that would appeal to ordinary English Protestants and vilify Catholics.

Stoppa presented this account of the treatment of the Waldensians in 1655:

Those poor souls, who believ'd him [the Marquis] not capable of such black a treachery, to testify their submission to his Highness Orders, receiv'd those wicked regiments, which were no sooner in, but the whole army did follow, and presently began their work, and put all to fire and sword, making an horrible slaughter of all they found, without distinction of quality, age or sex, young and old, men, women and children, rich and poor, all were indifferently kill'd, although by very different torments, and with such cruelties, as can hardly be imagin'd. Many were burnt alive, some hang'd by the feet to a tree; other torn in pieces, divers were strangely slasht and cut, then Salt and Pepper being laid on their wounds, and their shirts put on again, they were burnt in that sort, and so made Martyrs in an unknown way all to preceding Tyrants and Monsters. Some stript naked, and tyed head and legs together, were tumbled down the Mountains, Others were nail'd into the ground through the belly with stakes, and others were spit through the fundament, after the manner of the Turks, and others through the middle. Many women having first been ravish'd, and endured divers outrages and ignominies, had afterwards their heads chopt off. A great number of little children have been barbarously butcher'd, some being cast down headlong from high places, others pull'd asunder by two soldiers, who held them by the feet, and a third sort had their brains dasht out. Finally such strange cruelties have been us'd against them, as were unknown to the very Heathen, far from being exercis'd by Christians.⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Anon., *Declaration and Manifesto*, 5.

⁹⁹ Stoppa, *A collection, or narative*, 7-8.

Similarly, the 1686 massacre occasioned a number of melodramatic pamphlets, histories, and tracts to appear on the international market. Histories, dripping page after page with blood, chronicled children being sliced into hundred of pieces, “prisoners skinned alive, the pregnant, blind and old being slaughtered, parents being killed trying to defend their children or witnessing their children being killed, and the killing of women after which the soldiers ‘satiated their infamous lusts on the very Bodies of those whom they had deprived of life.’”¹⁰⁰ A 1688 publication reified the stunning emotional cost of the massacre, telling personal stories such as that of Daniel Moudon, one of the Church elders:

Having been the Spectator of the death of John, and James Moudon his two children (whose heads the Soldiers cut off) after he had seen the body of the wife of John ript up from the Navil, and her daughter’s brains beat out, who was not above 6 weeks old, and the two children of James cut in Pieces, (one of which was 4 years old, and the other 14 months) was constrained by these Monsters, to carry cross his shoulders the heads of his two sons, and to march barefoot 2 hours journey, near Lucerna, where he was hang’d in the midst of these two heads, which were fastnd to a Gibbet.¹⁰¹

The Waldensians were, without exception, shown as blameless, pious, and pure; even heroic in the face of persecution; their oppressors painted as the basest evil ever to walk the earth.

The term ‘purity’ acquired a double sense for the Waldensians referring both to their virtue and their constancy. Perrin’s 1655 tract stressed the Waldensians’ “piety and purity in religion, both for doctrine and discipline,”¹⁰² and Stoppa’s book traced that purity back to the earliest days of Christianity:

Amongst all the Churches of Christ, that do profess the pure & holy Religion which he hath taught in his Word, that of the Waldenses is the most considerable, as well for her Antiquity, as for the sharp and continuall persecutions it hath suffered. Her Antiquity is

¹⁰⁰ Anonymous, *A Short Account of the Persecution of the Waldensians* (Oxford, 1688). In Marshall, *Toleration*, 56.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 57.

¹⁰² Jean Paul Perrin, *Matchlesse crueltie declared at large in the ensuing history of the Waldenses* (London: Edward Brewster at the Crane, 1655), 1.

such, that no man can truly find out her beginning: so that even her Adversaries say, that the Heresie of the *Waldenses*...began in the Apostle's dayes, and allwaies hath been in the Valley of Angrogna.¹⁰³

What we can glean from these documents is the relationship the English were attempting to build with the remote Waldensians: in presenting the Waldensians as the ancestors of Protestantism, the English were placing a value on the religious purity of the one-time heretics. Their solidarity with the persecuted Waldensians obliged them to protect their Protestant brethren in dire straits. Thus the deceit of *ancienneté* and the claim of continuity served to create important political allies that ultimately helped ensure the survival of the Waldensian people.

Conclusion: The Importance of Waldensianism to the (English) Protestant Identity

The belief that the Waldensians formed a foundation of Protestantism necessitated a measure of continuity; if the Waldensians had greatly changed their doctrine to fit with the Reformation, then what had come before was not suitable to be the precursor to Protestantism. The important part of this is the belief itself; despite obvious differences in religion, the believers persevered. Systemic belief in continuity created or reinforced the continuity itself. The concept of a venerably ancient religious tradition not only provided for the Waldensians the very basis of their identity, but it also furnished the group with a newer component of that identity: a link to Protestant and Reformed tradition.

As A. Cameron Airhart notes, “the English audience that read of the persecution and the English government that subsequently took action identified these unfortunate people as both Waldensians and reformed Protestants. As reformed Protestants, they were deserving of support, both financial and diplomatic; as Waldensians, they were deserving of particular

¹⁰³ Stoppa, *A Collection*, 4.

attention, for their continuing existence made possible a sophisticated historical argument for the apostolicity of reformed Protestantism and for Cromwell's Protectorate as a legitimate government in tune with the providence of God. The Waldensians' importance was that they gave seventeenth-century Puritans a defensible historical connection with the apostolic church and proved that history was 'the story of God in action'.¹⁰⁴

The English found – indeed constructed – in the Waldensians an identity that was their own and universal; this creation produced an identity that served English political requirements. The production of books and letters in defence of the Waldensians created a legitimacy for the English who were struggling for Protestant dominance. In developing a Protestant identity for themselves, the English at times turned elsewhere to find the history they presumed to need. In this regard, the Waldensian attachment to Protestantism served its purpose. Indeed, as Pettegree aptly notes, “the formation of an independent English Protestant identity epitomised (not without a certain irony) the English Reformation's extensive dependence on the continental movement of which it formed a sometimes reluctant part.”¹⁰⁵

The English were seeking precedent for breaking with Rome on theological grounds to dignify their own Reformist faith; the Waldensians provided just that. The English, without exception, insisted on the unbroken, continuous embodiment of Waldensianism from 'time immemorial', or at least since the movement's inception. Waldensian documents themselves are firmly rooted in the belief of a categorically continuous identity, and it is this that the English documents reiterate and reinforce. The documents produced in this era sought mainly to paint the Waldensians as innocent bystanders watching their oppressors

¹⁰⁴ A. Cameron Airhart, 'Medieval Heretics and Cromwell's Protectorate', in *Medievalism in England: Studies in Medievalism IV*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 58.

¹⁰⁵ Pettegree, *Book World*, 322.

maim, destroy, and annihilate their families and ancestral lands, but somehow the feature that comes to the forefront of the documents reporting on the events is the constant reminder of that most important aspect of Waldensian identity: *ancienneté* and continuity. The histories are long-winded and filled with what modern readers would deem unnecessary details (a great many of which are, undoubtedly, patently untrue), but the documents served as instruments in political scheming in both England and Piedmont-Savoy; their propagandistic importance will be considered in the next chapter. The understanding that a continuous identity conferred legitimacy as True Christians was not lost on either side of the equation – the synchronicity between English top-down political ambition and popular opinion advocating for the Waldensians is no coincidence.

CHAPTER FOUR: THE WALDENSIAN IDENTITY AS PROPAGANDA

‘And there is no war so bloudie, as that which is undertaken in hatred of Religion; so to suffer proscriptions and exiles, confiscation of goods, and imprisoning torturing, and killing of bodies has been the ordinary excercises of the faithfull in those countries.’¹

“A *Pen!* The invention of that, and of *Inke* hath brought as many curses into the world as that damnable Witch-craft of the *Fryer*, who tore open the bowels of Hell, to find those murdering engines of mankind, *Guns* and *Powder*. Both these are alike in quality, in mischief: yea, and almost in fashion; The Pen is the Piece that shootes, *Inck* is the powder that carries, and *Wordes* are the Bullets that kill. The one doth onely destroy men in time of warre, the other consumes men, both in warre and peace.”²

While the corresponding concepts of continuity and *ancienneté* were by far the most important aspects of Waldensianism for the faith’s adherents and for Protestants, other characteristics of the group that became widely recognized as hallmarks took on significance as well. These aspects of the Waldensian image and identity became stereotypical in their presentation and were primarily used to evoke specific responses or emotions, particularly for propagandistic purposes. By the mid-1600s, the Waldensians seemed to have forgotten that the Reformation began as a top-down imposition that altered their religion so deeply that to their predecessors it would be unrecognizable. Eventually, the movement became one of popular piety, though it had initially been imposed by the *barbes*; both Waldensian and Protestant discourses treat the transformation as a natural coming together of two already similar factions to unite as one, pure, perfect group professing the apostolic and evangelical

¹ Giovanni Batista Stoppa, *A collection, or narrative, sent to His Highness, the Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland, & Ireland, &c. Concerning the Bloody and Barbarous Massacres, Murders, and other Cruelties, committed on many thousands of reformed, or Protestants dwelling in the Vallies of Piedmont, by the Duke of Savoy’s Forces, joyned therein with the French army, and several Irish regiments* (London: H. Robinson at the Three Pigeons, 1655), 3.

² Thomas Dekker, *The Dead Tearme* (1608), in Joad Raymond, *Pamphlets and Pamphleteering in Early Modern Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 53.

Christianity Jesus intended.³ The astounding attention paid to the Waldensians' ancient and continuous nature has been chronicled above, but other factors began to become even more significant as time wore on. True, in 1655 and 1686-89 the group's continuity and *ancienneté* were the most important aspects of their identity, and those played an enormous role in their publicity, but with fame came importance on the international political scene.

A Multifaceted Identity: The Waldensian Identity and Public Representation

Identity can be constructed internally, but it can also be a projected image; identity is not only how a group or individual sees him or herself, but also how others see that entity. The public identity of the Waldensians in seventeenth-century England was a synthesis of the image presented by the Waldensians themselves and the image conceived and projected by the English Protestant public. The characteristics represented in the Waldensians' image in the literary sources demonstrate a number of things: the Waldensians were, for English and Protestants alike, a means of legitimizing their Protestant *ancienneté*, a defence of resistance to Catholic rule, a unifying factor in the idea of Protestant solidarity, and a justification of political decisions (as well as a bargaining tool used in attaining these goals). Several of these aspects began to play into pamphlets and documents. A major part of the Waldensians' strategy was to write in such a way as to create connections and commonality with Protestants, and this trend was picked up by Protestant authors. The various characteristics of their identity and their unique situation found their way into the idioms and expressions used in documents, and these served to create and embellish relationships between Protestant groups. The assorted features of the Waldensians which became so prominent in the

³ Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 174.

literature also served another purpose: to elicit international sympathy. This was the salient point of the documents: with sympathy came aid; with apathy came war and devastation. In seeking to engage rather than alienate similar Protestant cultures, the Waldensians and their sympathizers endowed the group with various characteristics in an effort to generate commonality and understanding and thus political support.

After their fusion with the reformed tradition, the Waldensians began to make explicit links to the people they considered their coreligionists, and to distance themselves even further from Catholicism and the ‘tyranny of Rome’. Though the Waldensians did not refer to themselves as ‘Protestants’ as the English did, they did promote commonality nonetheless, as well as presenting themselves as diametrically opposed to Catholicism (which was also a way of encouraging unity of Reformers).⁴ They sought to endow their image with characteristics that would make them amenable to association and cooperation with fellow Protestants. In their plea to Protestant rulers across Europe for help, they relied on their *ancienneté* as well as the idea of Protestant solidarity to provoke empathy:

And We, *the Said Inhabitants of the said Vallies*, do hereby in the *Bowels of Jesus Christ our common Saviour*, Obtest, Require, and Beg all Christian *Emperours, Kings, Princes and Free States*, that they would Compassionate our Condition, and Intercede with His *Royal Highness the Duke of Savoy*, for the Restoring to *Us* the Rights, Properties, and Liberties that have been so cruelly and unjustly ravished from *Us*; and that they would procure to *Us* a firm and lasting Peace, that we may no more be exposed to such horrid *Barbarities* and Distresses for the Religion we derive from our Father, through the successions of a great many Ages.⁵

While it is true that this does not mention Protestantism *per se*, the act of using ‘Christian’ instead of specifying religious denominations suggests that those who are ‘true Christians’ (i.e. not Catholics) might be sympathetic to the Waldensian plight, and in making reference

⁴ See ‘Nomenclature, Terminology, and the Waldensian Identity’ for details on the use of ‘Protestant’ as a designation.

⁵ Anon., *Declaration and Manifesto*, 6.

to the ‘religion of their fathers’ the author made an explicit link to the Protestants who believed in Waldensian *ancienneté*. In designating Protestants as True Christians, the Waldensians also endowed their own image with an anti-Catholic sentiment, and aligned themselves with Protestant Europeans (though this group was far from united itself). Arnaud even specifically illustrated the Waldensians as a counter to Rome, describing their resistance against “la cruelle bête Romaine” in the preceding centuries.⁶

Despite harbouring bitterness against the ‘cruel beast’ of Rome, the Waldensians also characterized themselves as faithful subjects to their Catholic ruler. This seemed to be a matter of critical importance to the Waldensians in establishing their longevity as the rightful residents of Savoy since ‘time immemorial’, since which time “We, the *Inhabitants* of the Vallies, lived in great Peace, and did many Remarkable and Important Services to the late *Duke of Savoy*, Father to his present *Royal Highness*, and to his *Royal Highness* himself.”⁷ Indeed, an intrinsic part of the Waldensians’ identity seemed to be their unshakable belief in their legitimate right to practice their religion, due not only to their belief in holding the true faith, but also as loyal supporters of their overlord. Stressing this point was crucial not only for a future relationship with the Duke, but also to demonstrate to fellow Protestants that they were loyal, trustworthy, and dependable allies. Despite the principle of *cuius regio, eius religio* that dominated Europe at this time, the Waldensians were firm in their belief that they had the right to liberty of religion, and indeed this belief was borne out on numerous occasions when the rulers of Piedmont-Savoy acquiesced to the otherwise loyal Waldensians and granted them the right to practice their religion (albeit with several caveats):

⁶ Henri Arnaud, *Histoire de la glorieuse rentrée des Vaudois dans leurs valeés*, ed. Georges Tourn (Torino: A. Meyer, 1988), preface.

⁷ Anon., *Declaration and Manifesto*, 3-4.

Their *Royal Highnesses* were pleased at several times, and upon several occasions, to Ratifie our *Rights* and *Priviledges*, and to grant us full and free Liberty in the Exercise of our Religion; and particularly in the Years 1561, 1602, 1603, and in the Year 1620. All of which were Formally and Solemnly *Ratified* and Enrolled in the *Chamber of Turin*, and declared to be *Irrevocable, Inviolable, and Perpetual* Laws: And the Execution thereof was Ordained by several *Decrees* of the said *Chamber*, and by the *Senate of Turin*, in the years 1638, 1649, 1654, and 1655.⁸

The concessions made by the Duke to the Waldensians cannot but have served to reinforce their belief in their purity and righteousness. In keeping with that belief, they often depicted themselves in biblical terms, inserting allegorical references into their writings and even making outright comparisons to biblical figures. The Waldensians appeared to identify most closely with the wandering ‘Children of Israel’, God’s ‘chosen people’. Particularly following *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, parallels to the exodus from Egypt can be found aplenty, both in Waldensian and external sources. Modern-day historian Giorgio Tourn wrote an introduction to Henri Arnaud’s account of the journey. The account, he says, is flush with allusions to the biblical tale:

Le terme, il est superflu de le souligner, est biblique...on trouve, sous-jacentes, des allusions aux exploits de l’Exode biblique. Le desert, ce sont les montagnes de Savoie balayées par les neiges et les averses, lieux funestres, sans vie, les masures abandonnées ou les villes closes, les ponts coupés et les bergers trompeurs, ce sont jusqu’aux vallées natales elles-mêmes, devenues peu sûres à cause des frères parjures et traîtres, des amis déserteurs et des maisons vides, où dix homes doivent se partager une poignée de châtaignes. Les populations parfois sont défiantes et hargneuses commes celles des Amalécites. Les combats incertains et la capitivité qui toujours menace de son cauchemard, telle est la forme moderne de la servitude en Egypte.⁹

Arnaud did indeed present his people as God’s Chosen People, citing God’s constant presence in the surprising victories the Waldensians occasioned over the years: “L’Eternel a toujours combatu avec eux, & qu’il a voulu faire éclater leur valeur, afin que considerant ce

⁸ Anon., *Declaration and Manifesto*, 3. The existence of these treaties is verified by several contemporaneous documents of non-Waldensian provenance. See, for example, Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival*, trans. Claire Davison (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 200.

⁹ Giorgio Tourn, introduction to Henri Arnaud, *Histoire de la Glorieuse Rentrée*, xxiv-xxv.

petit nombre de fideles de Jesus, on admire d'autant plus en eux la puissance de sa divine Majesté.”¹⁰ Arnaud’s conviction in God’s assistance is reiterated in a letter, written during the fighting and published in 1690. The letter praises God for sending strength, hope, and military prowess, and attributes to him the success of *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, and the ‘miracles’ which occurred during the expedition:

I praise him also for his Divine Assistance, which has enabled us to resist the *Devil* and 13000 Men.... We are about Publishing the History of the Miracles, which God has wrought in behalf of his Children, that all the World may know there is a God in Heaven, to raise up his to Witness when the time markt out by his Providence is come.¹¹

Monsieur des Loches, a Waldensian Colonel, professes a similar position in a letter, proudly noting that “I must confess...that I visibly found that God by his Providence did watch for our Preservation.”¹²

It was not only Arnaud’s account that made Biblical comparisons. Waldensian accounts likened them favourably to the Children of Israel, and also emphasized the hardships and suffering they endured on the road to their own ‘Holy Land’. And, like the story of Exodus, this tale, its author hopes, will become a recognizable archetype of the righteous trumping their cruel oppressors. “It’s known sufficiently to all the World,” declares the author, “what dreadful *Afflictions, Murthers, Rapes, Tortures*, and all manner of *Barbarities* we suffered...till we were reduced to a poor handful of *starved* and *infirm* Creatures, whereof the most of them perished in the *Mountains* for Hunger.”¹³ In this incidence, Tourn indicates, the mountains replace the desert, and the carnage symbolizes slavery and repression. This document makes continued use of biblical allegory to emphasize

¹⁰ Arnaud, *Histoire de la Glorieuse Rentrée*, preface.

¹¹ Henri Arnaud, *The Present state of the Vaudois, drawn out of the three letters* (London: Joseph Watts, 1691), 2.

¹² Colonel des Loches, *The Present state of the Vaudois, drawn out of the three letters* (London: Joseph Watts, 1691), 2.

¹³ Anon., *Declaration and Manifesto*, 5.

the righteous nature of the Waldensians, making explicit links to the exodus from Egypt. The Duke of Savoy, like Pharaoh, imposed cruel restrictions on his people, and treated them differently because of their professed religion. Both men reneged on their decisions, granting and then removing rights and privileges, if in very different contexts. Even the story of the Waldensian exodus from the valleys is painted in the same terms as the exodus from Egypt; the Waldensians were “forced to wander in strange Countries,” simply desiring to take possession of their “Native Country.”¹⁴

English and Protestant documents are consistent with Waldensian documents in their presentation of the group as God’s Chosen People. This integral part of the Waldensian identity not only accorded the group a special place in Protestant historiography, but also added legitimacy to English Protestantism in that it proclaimed a holy origin for the foundation of reform. Among the earliest to credit the Waldensians with pioneering reform was Theodore Beza, the illustrious French Huguenot. He detailed the ancient origin of the Waldensians and sought to demonstrate that God had protected them throughout their existence:

As for the Waldenses, give me leave to call them the very seed of the Primitive and purer Christian Church, being those who have been so upheld (as is clear and manifest) by the admirable Providence of God, that neither those infinite storms and tempests whereby the whole Christian World has been shaken for so many Ages together, and at length the Western parts to miserably oppressed by that Bishop of *Rome*, falsely so called, nor those horrible persecutions which have been directly raised against them, were ever able to prevail upon them.¹⁵

It was a mark of the esteem the English gave to the Waldensians in placing them in the category of God’s people; directly crediting God with their preservation through the manifold horrors visited on them elevated their status among their peers. Pierre Boyer

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Theodore Beza, *De Valdesium* (Geneva: Joan Laonium, 1580), in Morland, *History of the Evangelical Churches*, 12.

compared them to the ancient Jews, who are called ‘The Chosen People’. Though Christians in the seventeenth century commonly reviled Jews and held them as unclean, the biblical Hebrews were respected and revered. Like the ancient Hebrews, the Waldensians had been subjected to many trials and sufferings but had kept the faith. Boyer equated the ‘miracles’ bestowed on the Waldensians with such legendary events as the parting of the Red Sea, and his comparison with the Jews of antiquity was a favourable reference to God’s support:

Of all the people that have ever been, from the Creation of the world till our times, there is none except the ancient people of the Jews, whose History contains so many wonders as this of the Vaudois of Piemont; for whether one consider their Perseverance in the profession of the holy doctrine of the Apostles, or one reflects upon the wars they have maintained these 200 years, to preserve among them the Purity of the Christian Religion; one sees so many miracles of Wisdom, Goodness, and Power of God, that it’s impossible not to confess, that God has declared himself plainly to be the God of this people, and that he is the Protector and Defender of their Persons, as well as Religion.¹⁶

Bestowing the Waldensians with this legitimacy granted them a measure of prestige, and also sought to rectify the stigma of heresy assigned to the group.

Despite their deep belief in God’s love and favour and their use of this as a political symbol, the Waldensians nonetheless depicted themselves as poor and pitiable and downtrodden, and did not find the opposing ideas mutually exclusive.¹⁷ Indeed, persecution and God’s favour are intrinsically linked in Christian belief: martyrs were praiseworthy sufferers rather than people who were undeserving of God’s mercy. God’s favour did not preclude trials of faith; in fact the Waldensians accredited God with their survival through

¹⁶ Pierre Boyer, *The history of the Vaudois: Wherein is shewn their Original; how God has preserved the Christian religion among them in its purity, from the time of the apostles, to our days; the wonders he has done for their preservation, with the signal and miraculous victories that they have gained over their enemies; how they were dispersed and their churches ruined; and how at last they were re-established, beyond the expectation and hope of all the World* (London: Edward Mory, 1692), 4.

¹⁷ We should note that while poverty was still seen as a virtue, destitute and itinerant poverty had become regarded as a blight on society: the humanists believed that poverty devalued society. The depiction of the Waldensians as ‘poor’ thus has a double meaning. It endows them with a measure of respectability in evangelical terms, and also gives them the use of the more empathetic sense of the word. In addition, ‘poor’ could refer to their state of being; their existence as ‘martyrs’ with ‘suffering bodies’ as Jesus Christ lived.

the hardships rather than crying abandonment as they suffered. Accordingly, the Waldensians and their sympathizers did not shy away from emphasizing their pitiable condition in order to create an image that would garner sympathy and relief. Henri Arnaud depicted the Waldensians as desperate in a plea for help: “May I beg of you, Sir, to continue your charitable Offices in behalf of these poor and distressed *Vaudois*...”¹⁸

Since their inception in the twelfth century, the Waldensians had been ridiculed and persecuted and, at times, killed for their beliefs. Jean Léger’s account expounds on this defining factor of their history. The first book of his report contains “la veritable Histoire, & des persecutions que ces pauvres Vaudois ont Presque de tous tems souffertes.”¹⁹ Arnaud portrays his people in a similarly victimized light, characterizing them as “des Gens ruinés, pauvres, & de toutes manieres foibles.”²⁰ He also went above and beyond Léger, adding details about the oppressors to further accentuate the Waldensians’ identity as a persecuted people: “Si les Demons sortoient déchainés des enfers, leur furie & leur rage contre les Chrétiens, ne seroient point encore si exécrables, que la barbarie des Papistes l’a été contre les Vaudois.”²¹

Perhaps most poignant and evocative of the dire circumstances of the Waldensians is the poem immortalizing their tragic situation in 1655, Milton’s *Sonnet XVIII: On the Late Massacre in Piemont*. Milton’s poem is a call for justice; a cry for aid wrought from their pathetic situation.

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,
When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones;

¹⁸ Arnaud, *Three Letters*, 2.

¹⁹ Léger, *Histoire*, Dédicace.

²⁰ Arnaud, *Histoire de la Glorieuse Rentrée*, preface. ‘Foibles’ here means ‘faibles’.

²¹ *Ibid.*

Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant; that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.²²

Milton's poem touches on multiple aspects of the Waldensian identity already addressed: he noted their ancient legitimacy, their capacity as preservers of God's truth, and the importance of their home valleys to their identity. The immortalization of the massacre in a form of literature other than political pamphlets and treatises serves to emphasize both the harsh reality of the events and the depth of the response to the affair. Milton painted the Waldensians into the paradoxical tradition of Protestant hagiography with his description of 'slaughtered saints', and explicitly presented the Waldensians in a miserable state of being. Samuel Morland similarly depicted the Waldensians' suffering as proof of their *ancienneté*: "I hope the ingenuous Reader is fully perswaded, that misery and affliction is much rather the mark of the true Church, then outward glory and prosperity."²³ Though not technically speaking an element that formed a part of the Waldensian identity *per se*, depicting the Waldensians as 'poor', 'downtrodden', and 'distressed' was *de rigueur*. Their portrayal as pitiable and pathetic became a kind of identity in its own right, certainly one the Waldensians and their sympathisers used to foster a culture of empathy and a willingness to reach out to the suffering group.

²² John Milton, "On the Late Massacre in Piedmont," in *Renaissance Poetry*, ed. Duncan Wu (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 124-125.

²³ Morland, *History of the Evangelical Churches*, 16.

Note, however, that the Waldensians were never characterized as broken or helpless; they always seemed to believe that they could and would emerge triumphant from the problems that haunted them. This optimism was never more evident than in the stories of *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, wherein the Waldensians resisted a much larger and more formidable army. They first sought to petition the Duke to rescind the hostile 1686 edict, but the response they received was negative. The Duke replied that it was “not in his power to recall the Edict, because his Royal Highness had past his Word to the Most Christian King already to the contrary.”²⁴ After unsuccessfully resisting, fleeing, and subsequently returning to Piedmont, the author justifies their violence by declaring that they will, eventually, be victorious. Instead of admitting the Waldensian recourse to violence, the anonymous author insisted that they sought only peace, and maintained an appearance of innocence, righteousness and conviction:

For according to the Terms of this Order, *We were to Remove in so few days, to leave such and such things behind us; we were to be separated in small Troops, so many miles from one another, That we expected to be just so treated as in the Massacre in the Year 1655. Upon which sad Juncture, we resolved to stand to our own Innocent and Lawful Defence, till we might appease by Foreign Intercessions the Wrath of the Duke of Savoy, and obtain for our selves a lasting Peace.*²⁵

The English granted the Waldensians the additional honour of identifying them as leaders in Protestant advocacy. Indeed, one of the most important and influential identities the English transposed onto the Waldensians is that of the ‘Champions of Protestantism’. The Waldensians identified themselves as ancestors of Protestantism, but did not go so far as to proclaim themselves its valiant defenders as the English did. In 1690, a Mr. Thomas Coxe, Esquire, envoy of Their Majesties William and Mary in Switzerland, wrote home detailing the situation to his patrons. Although the letter was later published, it was originally intended

²⁴ Anon., *Declaration and Manifesto*, 4. The ‘Most Christian King’ is Louis XIV of France.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 5.

for state information, and thus a relatively private reception.²⁶ This in no way detracted from the author's laudatory description of the Waldensians. He viewed them as righteous fighters for Protestantism: "Their Encouragement and Subsistence is of vast importance to the good Cause and the Protestant Religion, both there and in all these parts of the World....Oh what glorious things might be done in all *Europe*, and particularly in this, for its Freedom and Deliverance, and for the Honour of the Protestant Religion..."²⁷ The Waldensians were painted as fighting a legitimate fight for the defense of the Protestant religion, "against the unjust oppressions of the *Congregation of propagation*, and their other Enemys."²⁸

The Waldensians were well known to have fought for their 'Protestant' rights since the Reformation, but many accounts also extolled their earlier attempts to distance themselves from Catholicism: "they did not content themselves with a bare not entering into an Idolatrous and superstitious communion; but took all proper occasions to declare their abhorrence of it; with great courage and freedom of mind."²⁹ This history of struggling against Catholic dominance characterized the English documents' acclamation of the Waldensians. The many accounts of the persecutions are rife with tales of martyrdoms and courageous fights in defense of Protestantism, and they are laudatory of the men and women who refused to recant and embrace Catholicism even when faced with death, following the tradition of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*.

Indeed, the Waldensians, in undertaking the arduous journey of *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, made their own political statement. While this form of 'communicating' their intentions was less reliant on text and more on deed, the idea is the same: the Waldensian

²⁶ Thomas Coxe, *The Present State of the Vaudois, drawn out of Three Letters* (London: Joseph Watts, 1691), 1.

²⁷ Coxe, *Three Letters*, 1.

²⁸ Anon., *An Account of the Late Persecution*, 20.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3.

identity was based in a heritage of exclusion and persecution, and also on the belief that they had transmitted the true embodiment of Christianity through the centuries. This sense of legitimacy was enough to motivate the Waldensians to resist the incursion of the duke's troops in both 1655 and 1686, and it was strong enough once again in 1689 to guide them through the hardships of reclaiming their own land, property, and liberty.

A tradition of imagined continuity supplanted the realities of evolution and created a means of substantiating a link with Protestant groups. The Waldensians were endowed with various characteristics, which when presented in propagandistically-worded documents lent a hand in legitimizing relationships between Protestants and Waldensians while at the same time provoking international sympathy and commonality. These smaller, linguistically-based propaganda pieces were not the group's only presence on the international political scene. The Waldensians were to become a valuable symbol and bargaining chip in continental and English politics.

Foreign Affairs and Internal Affairs: Using the Waldensian Identity as Propaganda

Because of the enormous authority their supposed ancient legitimacy bestowed on the Waldensians, they were often used as a tool in the political machinations of the seventeenth century. Not only did the Waldensians represent a legitimizing force for Protestantism, at the same time their claims of protecting the True Church through the intemperance of the middle ages undermined the Catholic Church. Because of the potential the Waldensians had to provide ancient legitimacy for Protestantism as well as political pressure, the Waldensian identity became critically important in propaganda. As we began to see above, various characteristics of the Waldensians, especially their plight as victims, were used to elicit

emotional, religious, or political responses. The texts produced in the seventeenth century were paradigmatic examples of widely disseminated propaganda in the interest of diverse political goals. Politicians - particularly in England - made use of the group as a bargaining tool in their international political transactions. To understand the importance of wielding the Waldensians as a key piece of Protestant weaponry, we must understand the political climate of the day.

In 1654, the political scene was volatile. French and English relations had cooled rapidly with the 1649 execution of King Charles I, but during the war between the Dutch and the English (beginning in 1652) the French slowly came around to the idea of an alliance with England. Protestant England was a looming threat to France, even in the turmoil following the English civil war, and the French Cardinal Mazarin sent an ambassador to London to broker a deal. Cromwell shrewdly played him off, still considering an alliance with Spain, improbable as that may seem.³⁰ England was traditionally a hotbed of anti-Spanish sentiment, and by late 1654 Cromwell decided that he would pursue an alliance with France. However, the Piedmontese Easter in 1655 nearly derailed the whole affair. Instead of using the incident to allow for a break with France and an excuse to pursue the Spanish alliance he desired, Cromwell used the Waldensians as a means of securing for England a position of dominance in the bargaining process.³¹ Cardinal Mazarin saw the wisdom of intervening before events escalated, and sided with the English and the Swiss to force the Duke of Savoy to allow the Waldensians amnesty and a renewed vow of toleration.

In 1686, however, the political situation was vastly changed. Louis XIV's militantly Catholic France was sufficiently powerful (and without British opposition) to impose his will

³⁰ G.M.D. Howat, *Stuart and Cromwellian Foreign Policy* (London: A & C Black, 1974), 83.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 84.

on Savoy. Following the Glorious Revolution in 1688, however, the political atmosphere of Europe shifted dramatically. Not only had the return of a Protestant monarch to the English throne shifted the balance of power, but the Edict of Fontainebleau had tipped the scales against Louis. The edict had received poor reception in the courts across Europe, not because sovereigns were shocked that Louis presumed to impose his religion on his subjects, but because he both forbid a religious confession *and* essentially barred its followers from seeking exile.³² Almost immediately, an anti-Louis XIV coalition was formed, with William of Orange at its head.³³ The Calvinist William, out of sympathy for the plight of the Waldensians, as well as seeking to upset relations between France and the vacillating state of Savoy, encouraged the Waldensians resident in Geneva to mount a mission to reclaim their valleys, and they harkened to the call with fervour. William then proceeded to use the Waldensians as a political tool in his negotiations with Savoy. The Duke of Savoy was desperately seeking to avoid being crushed in the larger conflict of the Nine Years' War rapidly bearing down on the tiny state, and instead of turning to France as Savoy traditionally had, the Duke sought an alliance with the League of Augsburg. Because he was in a position of political disadvantage, partially created by William's determination to save the Waldensians, he agreed to the terms set out by William in their negotiations.³⁴ The Waldensians were granted an edict of toleration (although this was kept secret as Savoy did not wish to bring down the wrath of the Pope) and paid damages for their sufferings, as well

³² Audisio, *Dissent*, 209.

³³ Euan Cameron, *Waldenses: Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 294.

³⁴ Christopher Storrs, "Machiavelli Dethroned: Victor Amadeus II and the Making of the Anglo-Savoyard Alliance of 1690," *European History Quarterly* 22:3 (1992): 34, 350-355.

as joining forces with William's army against France; the maritime powers armed and supported the Waldensians.³⁵

The Protestant element in England was unhappy with a Catholic sovereign on the throne, and the 1686 massacre became a symbol of the dangers posed by allowing a Protestant population to be ruled by an antagonistic ruler. The massacre "provided central topics in the late 1680s in the Netherlands and in England about the legitimacy of resistance to the use of force by a ruler that were then made applicable to resistance to James in England, and to legitimation of the Revolutions of 1688-91."³⁶ The arguments of the danger posed by allowing Catholic sovereignty were also used in defence of the reimposition of Protestant rule in Ireland.

In the late seventeenth century's tense religious atmosphere, finding in the Waldensians a potentially uniting catalyst for Protestants across Europe could have been immensely beneficial. William shrewdly recognized not only the political and military force with which the Waldensians could provide him, but also saw them as the impetus behind achieving his political ends. While the Waldensians were not a uniting religious catalyst for doctrinal purposes, they were well-respected pioneers of anti-Catholicism, a conviction which Englishmen of all variants of Protestantism could unite behind. Thus, he encouraged the group to mount their expedition and further bestowed on them the strength they needed to promote their identity in a propagandistic manner. William's motivations in aiding the Waldensians were manifold. He sought to use the Waldensians' treatment as a bargaining tool in his political dealings on the continent, and to this end he instigated *La Glorieuse*

³⁵ Storrs, *Machiavelli*, 368-369.

³⁶ John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture: Religious Intolerance and Arguments for Religious Toleration in Early Modern Europe and 'Early Enlightenment' Europe* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 83.

Rentrée to spark conflict and unsettle Savoy, thus leaving the Duchy open to negotiations during the Nine Years War. Conveniently, these also placed William in a position to champion the Waldensians, securing for himself, like Cromwell, the title of Defender of the True Church. William had a separate motivation that Cromwell did not: he, as an invading monarch, needed to justify his right to the throne. He did so by using the massacre of the Waldensians as an example of the dangers of allowing a Catholic to rule a Protestant population. When the Waldensians successfully reclaimed their valleys, ideas of Divine Ordination surfaced as proof that God was miraculously preserving Protestantism through William's hand.

Cromwell used the Waldensians as a tool in his political dealings with France and Spain, but he also used the 1655 massacre as an excuse to further build relations with Protestant states across Europe. Part and parcel with the belief in the Waldensians as the founders of reform was the English objective of creating a pan-European Protestant brotherhood; a continental solidarity with its basis in the 'united front' of Protestantism (despite the manifold differences within that umbrella group). The Waldensians were a means of substantiating some form of pan-European solidarity, an idea which rose with the Reformation; by the mid- and late-seventeenth century solidarity was a well-established cause for foreign policy determination.³⁷ As Cameron notes, "the attitude that one group of Protestants ought to care about the fate of another, even if they were not of precisely the same confession, took deep roots in the later sixteenth century, for good or bad, it had much to do with the rise of 'internationalist' Protestantism in the years around 1600."³⁸ D'Assigny, writing in the late 1690s, scolded his fellow Protestants for allowing the ideals of solidarity

³⁷ Cameron, *Waldenses*, 273.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 274.

to escape them during the 1686 massacre. “Shall we forget all our Obligations to God and Nature, and suffer a foolish Loyalty to carry us away to a certain Destruction, when we may lawfully prevent it by Resolution and Courage?”³⁹

Cromwell was concerned with the promulgation of the ideas of unity and harmony, and charged John Milton with the task of promoting the Protestant League. The idea of Protestant solidarity was taking root in England, and the Waldensians became a useful tool in that ideology. Stoppa wrote eloquently of the bond that should unite the disparate but pious Christians toward a common cause:

Indeed as we are all members of one and the same Body, and oblig'd to be sensible of the Evills of one another, we ought above all to be lively toucht by the afflictions of those faithful witnesses of Jesus, who have suffer'd for his sake to maintain his truth and the profession of his Gospell...if the spirit of Christ dwell in us, that same spirit, who quicken us all, and hath fortified those faithfull souls in their suffering disgraces and losses for God, ought also to move us to succour them with all our power.⁴⁰

Cromwell used the massacre as a platform for cooperation on a political as well as religious level. He desired a rapprochement with the Swiss and sought to use the massacre as a means of expanding diplomatic ties.⁴¹ Cromwell also used the Waldensians in order to gain the upper hand in treaty negotiations with the French, as the English were sufficiently angry at a lack of French intervention – and indeed suspicious of French complicity - to consider calling off the alliance. A letter written by John Milton in Cromwell's name to Mazarin “suggests that French toleration of Protestants and aid in the Waldensian enterprise will advance the negotiations then in hand for a treaty between France and England.”⁴² Cromwell also had Milton draft letters to the Protestant powers – Charles Gustavus of Sweden, the

³⁹ D'Assigny, *A Short Relation*, 7.

⁴⁰ Stoppa, *A Collection, or Narrative*, 8.

⁴¹ L.A. Robertson, “The Relations of William III with the Swiss Protestants, 1689-1697,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 12:4 (1929), 141.

⁴² Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *The life of John Milton: a Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 331.

States General of the United Provinces, the Evangelic Cities of Switzerland, and Frederick III, King of Denmark – for the purpose of using the Waldensians as a uniting factor for the goal of the pan-European Protestant solidarity that Cromwell desired. These letters “sound common themes [as the letter to Mazarin] in much the same language: a review of barbarities, a report on Cromwell’s efforts, a plea to send their protests to Savoy and their aid to the Waldensians, and an invitation to join in some common action if the evil is not redressed.”⁴³ Even before the events of the Piedmontese Easter, in October 1654 Cromwell had sent parallel letters to the King of Sweden and to the consuls and senators of Bremen lamenting the outbreak of hostilities between them that threatened the interests of all Protestants, wherein he expressed his wish “that the entire name of Protestants should finally by brotherly consent and harmony unite into one.”⁴⁴

In May 1655 with the outbreak of hostilities in Savoy, Cromwell realized that he could use the situation to his advantage, and had Milton produce “impassioned denunciations and stirring calls for Protestant unity occasioned by the slaughter of the Waldensians, a notorious event in the annals of Protestant martyrology.”⁴⁵ Cromwell wrote to the Duke of Savoy on behalf of the Waldensians, noting that the Waldensians and the English “must acknowledge our selves linked together, not only by the same tye of Humanity, but by joynt Communion of the same Religion.”⁴⁶

When rumours and evidence of the massacre of the Waldensians began to reach London, both the population and Cromwell reacted energetically. Cromwell “naturally turned his attention, in his role of Protestant champion” to the plight of the Waldensians, and

⁴³ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 329.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 329-330.

⁴⁶ Oliver Cromwell, *Oliver Cromwell’s Letters to Foreign Princes and States, for Strengthening and Preserving the Protestant Religion and Interest* (London: John Nutt, 1700), 4.

his interest became of the utmost importance to the outcome of the situation.⁴⁷ In England (and Ireland), a national campaign for their relief resulted in churches being painted red to symbolize the bloodshed, important newspapers publishing treatises and pamphlets, and lurid descriptions of the massacre inspiring calls for monetary – if not military – aid.⁴⁸ Cromwell seems to have drawn inspiration from the Genevan example, and England soon became a centre of activity in defence of the Waldensians. Cromwell wrote to the Duke of Savoy on behalf of the Waldensians, just as he wrote to Louis XIV of France beseeching him to mediate with the Duke.⁴⁹ English Secretary of State John Thurloe's letter to Cromwell's political agent John Pell in Geneva on May 25th noted that the massacre "doth very much afflict his highness, and so it doth this whole nation."⁵⁰

Despite Cromwell's best efforts to induce the Swiss to protect their Protestant brothers, the Swiss refused to get involved militarily, much to Cromwell's displeasure, and he was forced to rely on diplomacy and propaganda to achieve his ends.⁵¹ Fortunately, this solution was successful. Using diplomacy rather than counter-force, Cromwell compelled Mazarin to force the Duke of Savoy to call off the campaign and leave the Waldensians to their Protestantism, and in October 1655, a commercial treaty was signed with France.⁵²

The accounts of the persecution of the Waldensians are replete with vivid descriptions of the tortures and barbaric acts done against them. The descriptive language

⁴⁷ Wilbur Cortez Abbott, *The Writings and Speeches of Oliver Cromwell: Volume 3: The Protectorate 1653-1655* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988), 707.

⁴⁸ John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration, and Early Enlightenment Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59.

⁴⁹ William Bridges Hunter, *A Milton Encyclopaedia: Volume 8* (London, Toronto, and East Brunswick: Associated Universities Press, 1978), 150.

⁵⁰ Dr. John Pell to Secretary Thurloe, in Robert Vaughan, *The protectorate of Oliver Cromwell and the state of Europe during the early part of the reign of Louis XIV: illustrated in a series of letters between Dr. John Pell, resident ambassador with the Swiss cantons, Sir Samuel Morland, Sir William Lockhart, Mr. Secretary Thurloe, and other distinguished men of the time: now first published from the originals, Volume 1* (London: Henry Colburn, Great Marlborough Street, 1838), 185.

⁵¹ Robertson, "The Relations of William III with the Swiss Protestants," 141.

⁵² Howat, *Stuart and Cromwellian Foreign Policy*, 84.

aimed to shock readers, either cementing their anti-Catholic bent in the case of propagandist literature in England, or eliciting an emotional response from the unsympathetic. This was the strategy Cromwell used when he wrote to the Duke of Savoy. The letter allowed the Duke to deny responsibility for the events, and instead appealed to the humanity of the Duke, graphically describing the horrors that unfolded and the damage done in his name:

[Cromwell] hath been informed...that part of these most miserable people, have been cruelly massacred by your forces, part driven out by violence and forced to leave their native habitations, and so without house or shelter, poor and destitute of all relief, do wander up and down with their wives and children, in craggy and uninhabited places, and Mountains covered in snow...Oh the first houses which are yet smoking, the torn limbs, and ground defiled with blood! Virgins being ravished, have afterwards had their wombs stuffed up with gravel and Rubbish, and in that miserable manner breathed out their last. Some men an hundred years old, decrepit with age, and bed-rid, have been burnt in their beds. Some infants have been Dashed against Rocks, others, their throats cut, whose brains have with more than Cyclopean cruelty, been boiled and eaten by the Murtherers.... Heaven it self seems to be astonied with the cries of dying men... Do not, O thou most high God, do not thou take that revenge which is due to so great wickedness and horrible villainies! Let thy blood, O Christ, wash away this blood!⁵³

This miserable state of the Waldensians was reinforced over and over again in documents that emerged to beg sympathetic nations for succor or to plead with their tormentors for their salvation.

In England, citizens used the Waldensians in their political demands. More than one group sent petitions to the already supportive Lord Protector, imploring him to take action against the atrocities visited on their Protestant brothers; emphasis was placed on the deplorable state of these people. One particular petition was sent by a group of elders of diverse congregations throughout London. They called on Cromwell to provide for the remaining Waldensians, using the dual identity of the Waldensians as True Christians and poor martyrs to argue their case, stating, “we know the miserable condition of the Waldenses

⁵³ British State Papers, *CM XIII* 485-7, in Barbara Kiefer Lewalski, *The life of John Milton: a Critical Biography* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 330.

[in Savoy], who by the tyranny of their Popish governors, after murder of their relatives, are forced to fly into the mountains rather than forsake the truth.”⁵⁴ Cromwell responded favourably, sending £2000 from the treasury to their aid.⁵⁵ According to A. C. Airhart, Cromwell’s motivation was not necessarily linked to his compassion, but rather to a hunger for legitimacy, both for himself and for his religion:

It seems probable that Cromwell wanted a history [Morland’s history, commissioned by Cromwell] written that would provide a place in *Heilsgeschichte* [loosely translated as ‘salvation history’] for his Protectorate, a history that would illuminate God’s purposes and show that divine providence had ordained the execution of Charles I, the ending of the monarchy, and the political experiments of the Interregnum. A properly written history of the Waldensians, a group well known to Cromwell from apocalyptic writings, would show that the medieval Waldensians, the ‘true’ church...had in the ‘last times’ of the seventeenth century metamorphosed into the reformed religion that Cromwell represented. This theological position would then justify the political actions of Cromwell, unique yet appropriate to the ‘last times’, and prove that his rule possessed a legitimacy not by human precedent or theory, but by foreordained divine authority.”⁵⁶

Cromwell’s motivation for aiding the Waldensians was, like William’s, a complicated matter. Compassion for co-religionists played a part, certainly, but the Waldensians provided more than an opportunity to secure a bastion of Protestantism on the continent. The timing of the 1655 massacre provided for Cromwell a means of securing dominance in bargaining an alliance with France as well as a way to prove to his godly population that he was a champion of Protestantism, not only at home but on the continent as well. He used the massacre as an excuse to build Protestant solidarity across the continent and to promote cooperation between Protestant states (although this was not particularly successful). This helped establish his reputation at home as the defender of the True Church. Finally,

⁵⁴ Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series, 1649-1660, preserved in the State Paper Department of Her Majesty’s Public Record Office, *Petition of several elders and brethren of divers congregations in and about London to the Protector*, 165. VOL. XCVII, 17 May 1655.

⁵⁵ Lewalski, *The life of John Milton*, 331.

⁵⁶ A. Cameron Airhart, ‘Medieval Heretics and Cromwell’s Protectorate’, in *Medievalism in England: Studies in Medievalism IV*, ed. Leslie J. Workman (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer, 1992), 66.

Cromwell may have been motivated by simple human emotion: the letters and reports sent back from Geneva to London paint the massacre in a particularly vivid and disturbing manner. Cromwell's motivations were certainly multifaceted, and it is not clear in the historical record which factor was the overarching cause of action. Whether Cromwell acted out of personal sympathy or for political reasons, or more likely, a combination of the factors, remains unclear. Indeed, there is no historiographical consensus on his motivation.

The events in 1686-1689 were used as propaganda in an entirely different manner than those of 1655. While the documents were, like those of 1655, heavy on descriptions of barbarities and vilifying Catholic oppressors, these descriptions took on a new dimension as legitimizing factors for Protestant resistance to Catholic power. The two most important authors in promoting the Waldensian situation in this way were Gilbert Burnet and Pierre Jurieu. Burnet had first come out with the idea of using violence against the Waldensians as a means of demonstrating the unchristian nature of Catholicism as early as 1673.⁵⁷ Burnet was concerned with the Catholic designation of Waldensians and Protestants alike as heretics; because “the argument that ‘faith was not to be kept with heretics’ was the central justification of Catholic atrocities throughout the centuries, and the nature of Catholicism was unchangingly barbaric: such massacres were not merely allowed, but required, by Catholicism.”⁵⁸

Burnet's 1687 *History of the Persecution of the valleys of Piedmont* appeared before both the Glorious Revolution and *La Glorieuse Rentrée*, and he used their massacre as justification for Protestant resistance and even as a call to arms. The Waldensians, Burnet declared, had been loyal to their ruler, and had even fought for him in battle. They had only

⁵⁷ John Marshall, *John Locke, Toleration and Early Enlightenment Culture* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 59.

⁵⁸ Marshall, *Toleration*, 59.

used force to defend themselves from massacre when attacked, and this, for Burnet, was ““a natural and warrantable defence against the unjust and violent oppression’ of the council of the propagation of the faith whose task was ‘to extirpate heresy’ . Burnet’s 1687 work was thus in part an extremely powerful martyrological exhibition of his ceaselessly repeated refrain that Catholic kings were untrustworthy, in part a defence of the miraculous preservation of religion by God, and in part a justification of the use of arms in natural and warrantable defence against unjust oppression.”⁵⁹ Burnet pioneered the idea of religion as property, thus nullifying the right to destroy it indiscriminately. Indeed, every subject had a right to defend his property, and Burnet justified resistance and defiance in this way.⁶⁰

Burnet was not only concerned with the fate of the Waldensians, however. The main purpose of his scathing criticisms of Catholic intolerance was, in fact, to rationalize Protestant rebellion. Before the Glorious Revolution was even conceptualized, Burnet had unknowingly used the massacre to justify William’s invasion of England.⁶¹ Post-1688, Burnet “continued to stress the avoidance in England of intolerant Catholic rule which he imaged to his audience through the Waldensians and Huguenots.”⁶² The Waldensians’ successful reclamation of their valleys confirmed to many Protestants that God was miraculously preserving Protestantism. Indeed, “this in turn helped to confirm to many that William was the providential deliverer of both England and Ireland from the Catholic James and should therefore be obeyed as God’s providentially chosen ruler, leading to an even

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ Burnet’s concern with Catholic rule extended even after the Glorious Revolution. His 1713 introduction to the third part of his *History of the Reformation*, sent to press far ahead of the body of the text, served “to warn readers in the strongest terms of the dangers of a Catholic monarch to both their lives and their property.” Andrew Starkie, ‘Contested Histories of the English Church: Gilbert Burnet and Jeremy Collier,’ *Huntingdon Library Quarterly* 68:1&2 (2005): 336.

⁶² Marshall, *Toleration*, 87.

greater discussion of the Waldensians in 1689-92 than in the immediate wake of their 1685-6 persecution.”⁶³

Pierre Jurieu was, perhaps, even more significant than Burnet in using the Waldensians to justify violent resistance and overthrow of Catholics. In 1686, Jurieu published his most famous work, *Accomplishment of the Scripture Prophecies*, wherein he anticipated the rise of Protestant power in 1689. The prophetic significance Jurieu assigned the Waldensians raised their profile even higher, harking back to earlier millenarian authors such as Joseph Mede and Thomas Brightman who cited the Waldensians as important, although never according them the significance Jurieu bestowed:

Jurieu argued that Revelation forecast a ‘last persecution’ by the Antichrist before his ‘total ruin’, and stressed that the French Catholic Church was currently making herself the ‘executioner of arrests’ in Piedmont ‘the most singular example of the spirit of persecution...ever seen’ since all other persecutors had stopped at persecuting only their own subjects. For Jurieu, the biblical prophecy of three and a half years of the death of the witnesses before their rising again in the book of Revelations might ‘be reckoned from the destruction of these Waldenses’ – a date which led Jurieu to forecast in 1686 their rising again in 1689 as a major stage in the inauguration of the millennium.⁶⁴

Like Burnet, Jurieu primarily used his writings to legitimize defence (but not imposition) of religion by force of arms. He proclaimed a ‘natural right’ to self-defence in the case of the Waldensians, and applied that same right to the English to “take up arms in self-defence against James’ transparent attempts to impose Catholicism.”⁶⁵ Jurieu’s predicted triumph of Protestantism may have been prematurely realized with the 1688 Glorious Revolution (albeit not precisely in a millenarian fashion), but his vision for French and Piedmontese Protestants remained unfulfilled. Instead, Jurieu’s works served, like Burnet’s, as propaganda to legitimize the 1688 Glorious Revolution and 1689 *Glorieuse Rentrée* before their inception.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 83.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 56-7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 85.

Burnet and Jurieu's promotion of resistance theory was a double-edged sword, however. While the idea of resisting an unfavourable sovereign was propitious for overthrowing Catholics, it was a potentially dangerous precedent to set for William III, an invading Calvinist (not Anglican) monarch, and the position was soon revised in English propaganda.

The Waldensians used their own sufferings in a propagandistic manner to solicit aid from their Protestant allies. They appealed to the idea of Protestant solidarity as well as eliciting anger and mistrust towards their Catholic oppressors. The Waldensians had been granted a very limited option of exile in the crisis following the 1686 edict, but the order was loaded with so many terms and conditions that it was very nearly impossible to comply. Instead, the Waldensians decided "to stand to our own Innocent and Lawful Defence, till we might appease by Foreign Intercessions the Wrath of the *Duke of Savoy*, and obtain for our selves a lasting Peace."⁶⁶ This first stand was unsuccessful, and the Waldensians were forced to remove or die, in theory. In practice, as the author woefully recounts, either sentence equaled death. "The miserable remainder, after our Enemies had sufficiently glutted their Rage with the Blood of our Brethren, were sent away to *Geneva* and *Switzerland* in the most deplorable Condition that was ever seen in the World: Many of *Us* dying in the Road through Cold and Sickness."⁶⁷ The author goes on to use the Waldensians' pride in their identity as well as emphasizing their connection to King William III to request relief from fellow Protestants.

⁶⁶ Anon., *Declaration and Manifesto*, 5.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Conclusion: The Waldensian Identity and European Power Struggles

The idea that the Waldensian religious tradition was a continuous entity defined the Waldensian identity in the seventeenth century. This claim to ancient and continuous faith became central in literary representations of the Waldensians, produced by Waldensians and Protestants alike. The English national identity as a Protestant nation was particularly affected by the concept that the Waldensians provided an early foundation for Protestantism and Protestant thought, and the Waldensians thus occupied a prominent place in books and pamphlets produced in support of Protestantism. The Waldensian identity in the seventeenth century was firmly rooted in a past experience of exclusion and persecution, and the more recent experience of the Protestant revolutions. The belief that they had transmitted the true embodiment of Christianity through the centuries also impelled the Waldensians to consider themselves a separate entity; the inheritors of a long tradition of dissent from the Catholic Church based on their own belief in the purity of the Gospel. The belief in their *ancienneté* fostered by propagandist writings fuelled their fellow Protestants to take up the cross in defence of what they believed to be their mutual history, and to use that history as a tool to create a sentiment of Protestant commonality across the continent. The religious divisions that tormented Europe for centuries saw alliances, wars, treaties, and massacres done in the name of God, and all involved believed they were vindicated. Pierre Allix illustrates the depth of sectarian hostility:

I hope that an equal Reader...will easily conclude from these Remarks, that the cause of that implacable Hatred of the Pope and his Clergy, against the Churches of Piedmont, was nothing else but for the design of extirpating a race of People, whose zeal for the Purity of the Gospel engaged them to upbraid the Church of Rome with her Corruptions in matters of Faith, her Idolatry, her false and superstitious Worship, and her horrid Tyranny.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ Allix, *Some Remarks*, 158.

It is not surprising that the documents produced in support of the Waldensians paint them as blameless, pious Christians, and the documents produced against them vilify their heretical history. The Waldensians and the many facets of their identity were used as a tool of political manipulation, and these identities and characteristics were reshaped to fulfill the desired purpose. As a part of the wider Protestant legacy, the Waldensian identity took on an importance far beyond the simple conviction of its adherents.

The Waldensians were used as pawns in the political power struggles of the seventeenth century, and they profited greatly thereby. While certain characteristics were played to the forefront in their public image, it was their inherent Protestant nature that made them significant for the propagandists. Their struggles and sufferings would have been insignificant in the historical record without their association with Protestantism. Yet it is that very association that calls into question the validity of the most important part of their history. The Waldensians provided for Protestants a direct example of the horrors made possible by Catholic rule, and their authority as Protestants came from their supposed *ancienneté* and the long-standing continuity they offered to Protestantism. Without that continuity, the Waldensians would have carried far less significance through their history and thus might have been given far less attention through their trials and tribulations. The Waldensians themselves would not have been so confident in their right to profess their ancient religion and vindicated in their battles should they not believe in their continuous history.

Again we see the importance that continuity held for both the Waldensians and their sympathizers in the larger fight for Protestant solidarity and victory. That legacy of continuity provided for the Waldensians not only justification for their struggles, but also

their means of survival. The relationship created by the legend of continuity allowed Protestants to dwell on the Waldensians' situation and to intervene on their behalf, disrupting Catholic plans to eradicate the group. As John Marshall aptly puts it, "emotive and personalized accounts of violence gave the persecution of the Waldensians significance beyond their numbers to Protestants across Europe; in describing the Waldensians as anciently 'illuminating' the universe and in attributing to them a central apocalyptic role in the overthrow of the Antichrist, Burnet and Jurieu voiced two further reasons why the fate of the Waldensians held a significance for Protestants in the 1680s that far outweighed their numbers."⁶⁹

⁶⁹ Marshall, *Toleration*, 57.

CONCLUSION

“How can you say that your truth is better than ours?”¹

The story of the Waldensians created an explosion of interest in the group in the mid- and late-seventeenth century. Particularly in England, this interest manifested in pamphlets, histories and propaganda using the Waldensians in a variety of manners for various purposes. Scandalous details of the massacres provoked indignation, sympathy, international intervention and relief for the distressed population; stories of the massacres provided justification for revolution against the dangers of Catholic rule; their ancient and continuous religious identity endowed early legitimacy on Protestantism. The preexisting conviction that they had carried Jesus Christ’s message – uncorrupted – through the vicissitudes of Catholicism became a foundation of the new tradition of Protestant reform. Particularly for English Protestants, the Waldensians became symbolic of an ancient legitimacy based in the inheritance of apostolic ideals.

For the Waldensians themselves, the possession of an uninterrupted identity was never a question. Their self-definition as the inheritors of an ancient religious tradition shaped not only their vision of themselves, but the image they projected to the rest of the world as well. Despite many valid arguments against continuity through the Reformation, the Waldensians remained convinced of the opposite. While their theology certainly endured a great change, their conviction, faith, and to a great extent their beliefs, did not. Most importantly, the merger with the Reform movement did not extinguish their self-imposed identity.

¹ Mumford and Sons, ‘I Gave you All.’ *Sigh no More*, Island Records, 2009.

Even the assertion of a loss of doctrine can be called into question. The Reformation was, in a sense, a return to the inspiration for Waldensianism: the three founding pillars of reformist theology did not stray altogether too far from Valdès' original impetus. Of the three pillars of the Reformation - Justification by faith alone (*sola fide*); the priesthood of all believers (by which every person was entitled to examine the holy scriptures for himself); and the infallibility of the Bible alone (*sola Scriptura*) - the latter two points were an exact echo of Valdès' ideology, and were solidly in keeping with the tradition of Waldensian thought and practice.²

The claims the Waldensians made for continuity were not based in the strict reality of theological religious continuity, but on the deep-seated belief that they had maintained their religion. In this conviction we can find a basis for the validity of their claims, as the socio-cultural reality of everyday life surpassed that of doctrine. The continuity of religious identity, then, can be found in the sphere of belief.

Waldensianism as an identity certainly endured through the Reformation, and it is this that I contend holds a more important place in the continuity debate than the strict definition of religion solely as theology. Their religious self-definition lay heavily in their heritage of exclusion and persecution, and maintaining their identity throughout multiple periods of intense upheaval points to an unshakeable belief in continuity.

The Waldensians became important in a socio-cultural sense to the wider umbrella of Protestantism as a 'founding member' despite the questionable veracity of that statement. Though their religion changed dramatically from pre-Reformation to post-Reformation, their intrinsic socio-cultural identity as a counter to Catholicism remained the foundation of their identity, and the belief that they had a continuous identity and an uninterrupted set of

² Audisio, *Waldensian Dissent*, 162.

religious practices was more important to the wider Protestant ideology than the strict reality of history. Their importance as an oppositional force to Catholicism and their significance in justifying both Protestant resistance and overthrow of Catholic overlords caused the Waldensian story to feature prominently in Protestant propaganda in the seventeenth century. The Waldensians represented a tangible manifestation of a foundational myth of Protestant legitimacy, and the idea of continuity of religion played a major role in actualizing that belief.

Indeed, it was the Waldensians' indefatigable faith in their *ancienneté* and continuity that linked them to Protestants across Europe, and it was that which provided a means of survival for the group. Their claims to continuity, whether accepted by mainstream historians or not, proved to be sufficient for their fellow Protestants. They connected to the Waldensians through their belief in the group as a longstanding precedent to Reformed thought, dwelling particularly on their continuity as the bridge between apostolic, medieval, and contemporary True Christianity. It was this connection that served as political and religious motivation, triggering foreign groups of Protestants to intervene on behalf of the Waldensians to literally save their skins, and ultimately their religion.

I posit that continuity, for the Waldensians, was based in belief. Rather than relying on theology to explain this phenomenon, we have turned to non-theological factors to explain how a tradition of ancient heritage coupled with a quasi-continuity in socio-cultural institutions could institutionalize a belief so deeply in a people. It is in this context that I have revisited the historiographical debate on the Waldensians. As I examined the history of the Waldensians through the Reformation, I found it necessary to deviate from the historiographical trend that has dominated the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The belief in a break with the Reformation has led to a partition between medievalist and early modern

examinations of the Waldensians; the two eras do not interact (although this is primarily due to the fact that there are, essentially, no historians of the post-Reformation Waldensians). The Waldensians deserve a more comprehensive approach. Instead of reinforcing a constructed division, I chose a *Longue Durée* approach to their story.

Examining the Waldensians from a *Longue Durée* perspective opened up a new history of the movement, one that does not end in the sixteenth century. Because the views of the Waldensians contrast so sharply with those of modern historians, it can be rationalized that the ‘death’ of Waldensianism with the Reformation was a teleological construction imposed on the group. Seventeenth century Waldensians never believed they ‘discontinued’ their religion; that is a modern perception. I believe that the Waldensian perspective is equally important – if not more so – than that of modern historians far removed from the actual events, and thus a reexamination of their history becomes necessary.

I have suggested that modern historiography’s conclusions tend to be teleological in nature; almost revisionist, an interpretation based on the pre-determined conclusion that doctrine defines religion and religious identity. Imposing a narrow modern definition of religious continuity rather than acknowledging the group’s own view of what constitutes a religious identity disenfranchises and belittles the importance of the beliefs of those who were in fact the owners of the religion. Scholars, while providing the historical facts, do not necessarily take into account the human agency we must understand in order to fully consider Waldensian religious history. Since their religion provided such a strong rallying point for the Waldensians, it must have been something that encompassed not only their confessional faith, but also their socio-cultural reality. While it is undoubtedly true that the original Waldensian theology was fundamentally altered in 1532, religion consists of more than just theology. Despite the theological articulation that arrived with the 1532 decision,

the Waldensians' faith still resonated within the same community structures and perpetuated the same socio-cultural standards and traditions. The Waldensians believed that their religious tradition continued through this radical alteration, pointing to the importance of culture and society on a similar plane as theology.

The methodology of this thesis is neither theological nor truly based on a sociological or anthropological framework. While I have certainly drawn on the latter's ideas to formulate my hypothesis on the construction of the continuity myth, further, deeper analysis based in those fields should necessarily be undertaken; the importance of ritual and practice in furthering a belief in continuity should be examined. I suggest that future studies should not be limited to traditional historical perspectives, but should more fully incorporate sociological and anthropological ideas to provide a more complete picture of the Waldensians.

The Waldensians' survival through the persecutions of the Middle Ages and the Reformation era allowed them to finally achieve full social and political liberty in Italy in 1848, and the *Chiesa Valdese* still continues in the Piedmontese valleys.³ In the nineteenth century, the Waldensians migrated to the New World, founding Valdese, North Carolina, and the wider community of the Waldensians of the Rio de la Plata in Argentina and Uruguay. They have subsequently spread across North America.⁴ Though these modern communities have almost all integrated with various Protestant organizations, they still maintain their name and identity. This modern proof of socio-cultural continuity in the face of doctrinal assimilation reflects a pride and commitment to an identity that transcends time and space.

³ Audisio, *Waldensian*, 212.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 213.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX A

Duke Victorio Amadeo, “Edict given at Turin, the 31th of January 1686, By the Command of his Royal Highness,” in Pierre Boyer, *The Negotiations of the ambassadors sent to the Duke of Savoy by the Protestant Swiss-Cantons, in favour of the distressed Vaudois* (London: R. Bentley, 1691), 4-8.

In an edict on January 31, 1686, the Duke of Savoy prohibited the practice of any religion other than Catholicism, and imposed a series of restrictions on the Waldensians and other Reformers to compel them to fall in line:

Christian Prudence and Policy do many times counsel Men in some manner to neglect those Sores and Ulcers which are not in a condition to be perfectly healed, but may grow worse by too hasty a cure. This course hath been taken in other Monarchies, and by our most Serene Predecessors, who indeed never had any other intention than to draw their Subjects, who profess'd the pretended Reformed Religion, out of the darkness of Heresy...and because those Religionists have had Succours from foreign Counties, this good work could never be brought to its desired end; so that we not being able to purge this Poison quite out of our Country, we stopp'd and shut it up in the Vallies of *Luzerne, Angrogne, St. Martin, Ceruse, St. Bartlemy, Roccapiata, and Perustin*, and by Toleration only suffer'd them to exercise their false Religion within certain prescrib'd limits, complying with the necessity of the times, till it should please God to afford us a more favourable opportunity to bring back these wandring Souls to the bosom of the Holy, and only Catholick, Apostolick, Roman Religion: but time having now discover'd the necessity of quite destroying this Serpent, and many-headed Hydra; since the aforesaid Hereticks, instead of answering this favour with humble submission and thanks, for our gracious Permission and Toleration, have often, with scandalous disobedience, insolently rebelled against us: And whereas the chief cause of granting such a Toleration now ceaseth, by the Zeal and Piety of that Glorious Monarch the King of *France*, who hath brought back again his Neighbour Hereticks to the true Faith; we think the particular favours which we have received from the Divine Majesty, and which we still enjoy, may accuse us of great ingratitude, if, by our negligence, we let slip the opportunity of perfecting this work, according to the intention of our Glorious Predecessors. For the causes aforesaid, and for other pressing Reasons, by virtue of this present Edict; we, of our certain knowledge, by our absolute Sovereign Power, and by the advice of our Privy Council, have Decreed, and Ordain'd, and we do Order and Command by these Presents, all our Subjects of the Pretended Reformed Religion, for the time to come, to forbear all Exercises of the said Religion, and we forbid them henceforth to Assemble in any Place or private House to exercise the said Religion, under any Title, Pretext, or Occasion whatever, upon pain of Death and

Confiscation of Goods. In like manner, we Ordain that the past pretended Toleration be utterly void, and of no effect, what colour or pretence soever may be alledged to the contrary. Our Will and Pleasure also is, That all Churches, Granges, and Houses wherein the said Religion is at present exercised, be pull'd down and raz'd, as also all other Places wherein for the future there may be any such Assemblies, contrary to the Tenour of the preceding Article, yea, tho' the Persons to whom such Places belong know nothing of such Meetings. We further Command all Ecclesiasticks, all Ministers and Schoolmasters of the said pretended Reformed Religion, who, within Fifteen days after the Publication hereof, shall not embrace the Catholick Religion, to depart out of our Dominions at the expiration of the said term of Fifteen days, under pain of Death, and Confiscation of their Goods; with express Command also, under the same Penalties, that during the said term, before their departure, they do not Preach any Sermons, Exhort, or do any other Acts of their said Religion. Moreover, we forbid all that profess the pretended Reformed Religion, under the aforesaid Penalties, and that of incurring our displeasure, to keep for the future any School, Publick or Private; that their Children may henceforth be instructed by Catholick schoolmasters.... The Children that shall be born of parents of the said pretended Reformed Religion, our Pleasure is, That after the publication of this present Edict, they be baptis'd by the Priests of the Parishes which are already established in the said Vallies, or which shall be established hereafter. We therefore Command their Fathers and Mothers, that they either send or bring their Children to the Churches, under the Penalty of the Father's serving Five years in the Gallies and the Mothers being publickly whipp'd: and the said Children shall henceforward be brought up in the *Roman* Catholick, Apostolick Religion.

APPENDIX B

From Allix, Pierre. Some remarks upon the ecclesiastical history of the ancient churches of Piedmont. London: Richard Chiswell, 1690, 156-157.

Claude de Seyssel (Claudius Seysselius) was Archbishop of Turin from 1517 to his death in 1520, right when the Reformation began but long before it had made any inroads into the Piedmontese valleys. Thus, his writings concern the doctrines of the Waldensians before they underwent any sort of alteration for Protestantism. This is a catalogue of Seysselius' observations of the Waldensians as recorded in Allix's 1690 tract.

'They receive only, what is written in the Old and New Testament.

They say, That the Popes of *Rome*, and other Priests, have depraved the Scriptures by the Doctrines and Glosses.

They say, That they owe neither Tithes nor First-fruits to the Clergy

They say, That the Consecrations of Churches, Indulgences, and other such-like Benedictions, are the Inventions of false Priests.

They do not celebrate the Festivals of the Saints.

They say, That Men do not stand in need of the Suffrages of the Saints. Christ abundantly sufficing in all things.

They affirm, That Marriage may be contracted in any degree, excepting only one or two at the most; as if the Popes had no Power to prohibit Marriage in any other degrees.

They say, That whatever is done to deliver the Souls of the Dead from the Pains of Purgatory, is useless lost, and superstitious.

They say, that our Priests have no power of forgiving sins.

They say, That they alone observe the Evangelical and Apostolical Doctrine, and upon this account, by an intolerable impudence, they usurp the Name of the Catholick Church.

Their *Barba* do err greatly, because they are neither sent of God, nor by the Pastors of the Church, but of the Devil; as appears from their Damnable Doctrine.

They say, That the Authority of hearing Confessions belongs to all Christians that walk according to the Apostle's Precepts (which their *Barba* attribute to themselves) because St *James* saith, *confess your sins one to another*.

They say, That we ought not to admit any kind of Prayer except it appear that it was composed by some certain Author, and approved of God, in order to obtain something of him. Their *Barba* have often preached this Doctrine, to abolish the Service of the glorious Virgin and other Saints.

They do not think that Christians ought to say the Angelical Salutation to the Mother of God, alledging, That it has not the form of a Prayer, but a Salutation: But it is only that they might rob the Virgin of this Service, saying, That it is not lawful to worship or serve her any more than the rest of the Saints.

They affirm, That the Blessings of the Priests are of no virtue at all. Did not Christ bless the Bread in the Desart? When the Apostles sate down to eat Bread, they Blessed what was set upon the Table.

They say, There is no need of Holy Water in the Churches, because neither Christ himself nor his Apostles either made it, or commanded it: As if we ought to say or do nothing but what we read was done by them.

They say, That the Indulgences allowed by the Church are despicable useless things.

They say, That the Souls of the Dead, without being tried by any Purgation, do immediately upon their parting from the Body, enter into Joy or Pains, and that the Clergy, blinded by their Couvetousness, have invented Purgatory.

They say, That the Saints cannot take notice of what is done here below.

They abhor and detest all Images, and the sign of the Cross, much more than we honour them.

They make no distinction between the Worship of *Latria*, which is due to God only, and that of *Dulia*, which belongs to the Saints.

As to the Fasts, which the Catholick Church has instituted for the Honour of God and the Saints, they have yet less reason to object these to us.

There is a pleasant Error *Seisselius* ascribes to them, about the nature of Lying, which evidenceth how great their Purity was as to this Article, and with what impudence it is that their Enemies calumniate them with Equivocation.

‘They affirm, That a Lye is alwaies a mortal Sin, because *David* says, *God destroys all lyars*. But it is evident that these general Propositions are to be moderated, otherwise who should be saved?’

But because in all this we have made no mention of Transubstantiation, the Bishop of *Meaux* will take it for granted, that in *Seisselius*’s time, the *Waldenses* received it as a Doctrine of Faith; but he will mistake himself if he do, for *Seisselius* declares that they rejected it to be a great Extravagance. He tells us also, ‘That they made a mock of all the Artifices they made use of, to make it appear more plausible to them. I think,’ saith he, ‘that those took pains to little purpose, who writing against this Sect, made it their chief business to insist upon the difficulties about the Sacrament of the Eucharist, and in order to the clearing of them, have spoken so sharply and subtilly, that I may not say confusedly, that I have great reason to doubt whether ever they understood the thing themselves. Yet I will not say, that because I do not comprehend it my self (for that I ingenuously confess) I think it also to surpass the capacity of other; but because it has alwaies appeared to me to be a point of that difficulty, that the most able have been fain to profess, That the strength of Humane Understanding must in this case be subject to Faith’: after which he useth his utmost endeavours to perswade the *Waldenses* to embrace an Opinion, for the which they had alwaies testified a great aversion.

By this we may see what was the Faith of the Believers of *Piedmont*, as far as *Seisselius*’s account thereof reacheth. And as for their Carriage and Conversation, the same *Seisselius* tells us; ‘They say, that they desire only to overcome by the simplicity of Faith, Purity, of Conscience, and Integrity of Life, not by Philosophical Niceties, and Theological Subtilties. Setting aside what they hold in opposition to our Faith and Religion, for the rest,’ saith that Bishop, ‘they for the most part lead a more pure life than other Christians. They Swear not at all, except be they forced to it, an very rarely rake the Name of God in vain: They honestly perform their Promises; and the most part of them living in poverty, they protest that they alone observe the Life and Doctrine of the Apostles, and therefore affirm, That the Power of the Church resides in them, as the true innocent Disciples of Jesus Christ, for the sake of whose Faith and Religion they live in Poverty.’

’Tis impossible to give them a more advantageous Testimony that what he gives them elsewhere, acknowledging, That they look’d upon it as an honourable and glorious thing to suffer the Persecutions which were raised against them by the Church of *Rome*.

APPENDIX C

Allix, Pierre. Some remarks upon the ecclesiastical history of the ancient churches of Piedmont. London: Richard Chiswell, 1690, 150-151. Full transcription of the interrogation in Latin, 171-177.

Another interesting comparison is through investigating the confession of Peyronette (or Peironetta), the widowed wife of a Waldensian named Peter Bernard (and presumably a Waldensian herself), in about 1494. She underwent a trial before Anthony Fabri, Doctor of the Canon of Embrun, Inquisitor General of Heresy in the counties of Vienne, Valence, and Die, and Christopher de Sabien, Doctor of Laws, Canon, and Vicar. She resisted answering the first interrogation she underwent, but caved and began to answer in the second and third interrogations she underwent.⁵ She confessed that about 25 years before (so around 1479) two strangers came to her house, friends of her husband, who spoke Italian or Lombard.

That whilst they were there at night after Supper, one of them began to read a Godly Book, which he carried about with him, saying, That therein were contained the Gospels, and other Precepts of the Law; and said, That he would expound and preach the same, in the presence of all that were present, saying, That he was sent by God to reform the Catholick Faith, going up and down the World, like the Apostles, to preach to good and simple People the manner and way how they ought to worship God, and live according to his Commands. And that amongst other things they declared, that no body ought to do any thing to others, which he would not be willing they should do to him.

Also, That God alone is to be served, worshipped, and prayed to, because it is he alone that can help us.

That to swear upon any occasion whatsoever, whether for Truth or Falshood, or any Oath whatsoever, wherein the word *by* is used, was a great Sin.

That the Sacrament of Matrimony was to be faithfully and firmly kept.

That the Good Works which are done before Death, are of far greater profit and advantage, than those that are done after Death.

That no Saints whatever, whether Men or Women, were to be prayed to for help, because none could assist us in any thing, but God alone.

That the Lord's day ought to be solemnly kept and observed above all other Holy days, because all other Holy-days were enjoined by the Church, which therefore were not of absolute necessity to be observed; yea, that a man might work on them, except the Festivals of the Apostles.

That the Clergy possessed Money, Riches, and Goods, beyond what they ought to do, and that they committed many Evils, and that by reason of the superiority of their Riches, some of them were Fornicators, other Usurers, proud and covetous; others again lived dissolutely and dishonestly, kept Whores in their Houses publickly and openly, and by this means gave a bad example to the People.

That these Priests, by reason of their wicked Lives, had no greater Power to absolve, than the Preachers and Masters of that Sect had; yea, that their Masters and Preachers, though Laymen had as much Power as the Priests.

⁵ Biller, *Waldenses*, 192.

That the Holy Pope, because he did not observe the Holiness he ought, had no Power at all, saying of him, *That he was as bad as any of the rest, and consequently had no Power at all.*

That there was no Purgatory in the other World, saying, *That when any one dies, his Soul immediately goes to Paradise, if he have lived well and justly; but if wickedly, to Hell.*

That consequently all Prayers and Intercessions for the Dead were in vain; and that all that the Priests did, signified nothing...

That God, in the beginning of the World, blessed all Waters, and all other things he had made; and that therefore there was no need for the Priests to bless them a second time, which indeed was then no better than other Water.

That the said Priests had invented Purgatory, that by singing and praying for the Dead, they might get store of Money to maintain their dissolute and luxurious Lives.

That it is better and more meritorious to give Alms to the Poor, Sick, and Leprous, than to offer it in the Church to the Priests, who had too much already.

That it was good and equally advantageous to pray to God in a House of elsewhere, as in the Church, because God is every where.

That though holy Men and Women were for their good Works placed in *Paradise*, yet had they no power to assist or help us in any thing, and that therefore they ought not to be prayed unto to help us.

That it was a vain thing to have recourse to the Images of the Saints, by praying before them as having no power at all, being only material things, or Picture made upon Walls.

That for the same reason it was a vain thing to go on Pilgrimage to *Rome*, or elsewhere, to pray there before the Images of holy Men and Women, as not being able to help us.

That it was not necessary to fast upon the Vigils of any Holidays, except those of *Christmas*, *Easter*, and *Whitsuntide*, and some other greater Festivals; and that on *Fridays* especially they ought to fast.

That the Preachers and Masters of their Sect, and the Priests, or Clergy-men, were formerly of one and the same Order and Degree; but that when the Clergy began to follow after Covetousness, and the Vanities of this World, and their Preachers resolved to continue in their first Poverty; by this means a Division and Separation happened amongst them, and the Clergy became their Enemies. That therefore because the number of their Preaches, and others of their Sect, was as yet but very small, they were obliged to walk up and down secretly, as Christ and his Apostles did, because if the Preachers should no walk cautiously and obscurely, they would be in danger of being persecuted and ill entreated by others.

It appears, that these Processes were in the year 1494, which Date is found at the beginning of these Examinations.

The foresaid Process, or Examination was taken by me Notary, who have subscribed my Name, GOBAUD.

APPENDIX D

Allix, Pierre. Some remarks upon the ecclesiastical history of the ancient churches of Piedmont. London: Richard Chiswell, 1690, 117-121.

“We have two famous Authors, who can inform us concerning the Faith and Conversation of the *Waldenses*...the one is an Inquisitor, who wrote in the XIV. Century, towards the end of it, *Who*, saith he, *had an exact knowledge of the Waldenses*, at whose Trials we had often assisted and that is several Countries; as himself witnesseth...

The first of these has borrowed a good part of *Raynerius* his Treatise, who wrote in *Lombardy* about the year 1250, which shews, that they had the same Opinions at the end of the XIV. Century, which their Ancestors had in *Lombardy* about the middle of the XIII....he hath annexed to every Article of the *Waldensian* Opinions, concerning the Doctrines or Practices of the Church of *Rome*, the occasion that induc'd them to embrace such opinions; which is a thing well worth our consideration, since we shall learn hereby, that the *Waldenses* had very exactly considered and weighed the Doctrines and Practices of that Church.”

Catalogue of the ‘errors’ ascribed to the Waldensians by this nameless inquisitor:

“Their first Error...is ‘That the Church of *Rome* is not the Church of Jesus Christ, but an assembly of ungodly men; and that She has ceased from being the true Church, from the time of Pope *Sylvester*, at which time the Poison of Temporal Advantages was cast into the Church.

2. ‘That all Vices and Sins reign in that Church; that that they alone live righteously.

3. ‘That there is scarce any one to be found in the Church, that lives according to the Gospel Rules, besides themselves.

4. ‘That they are the true *poor in Spirit*, who suffer Persecution for the Faith, and Righteousness sake.

5. ‘That they are the true Church of Christ.

6. ‘That the *Eastern* Church doth not value or regard the Church of *Rome*; and, That the Church of *Rome* is the Whore in the *Revelation*.

7. ‘They despise and reject all Ordinances and Statutes of the Church, as being too many, and very burthensome.

8. ‘That the Pope is the Head and Captain of all Errour.

9. ‘That the Prelates are the *Scribes*, and seeming religious *Pharisees*.

10. ‘That the Pope, and all his Bishops, are Murtherers, by reason of the Wars they foment.

11. ‘That we must not obey Prelates, but God alone, *Acts 4*.

12. ‘That none in the Church ought to be greater than any of their Brethren, according to that of *St. Mat. But ye all are Brethren*.

13. ‘That no man ought to kneel to a Priest, *Rev. the Angel saith to St. John, See thou do it not*.

14. ‘That Tythes are not to be given to Priests, because there was no use of them in the Primitive Church.

15. ‘That the Clergy ought not to enjoy and have temporal Possessions, *Deut. Neither the Priests, not any of the Tribe of Levi, shall have any inheritance with the Children of Israel, the Sacrifices being their portion*.

16. 'That neither the Clergy nor Religious ought to enjoy any Prebends.
17. 'That Bishops and Abbots ought not enjoy any Regalia.
18. 'That neither the Land nor People ought to be divided into Parishes.
19. 'That it is an evil thing to endow and found Churches and Monasteries, and that nothing ought to be left to Churches by Will. That there ought to be none a Tenant to the Church. And they condemn all the Clergy for their Idleness, telling them they ought to work with their hands as the Apostles did. They reject all the Titles of Prelates, as Pope, Bishop, &c. That no Man ought to be compell'd by force in matters of Faith. They condemn all Ecclesiastical Offices, and look upon them as Null and Void. They despise the Priviledges of the Church, and of Persons and Things belonging to it. They contemn Councils and Synods, and say, that all Parochial Rights, are only Inventions. And that all the Observances of the Religious are nothing else but Pharisaical Traditions.

As to the second Part of their Errors; they condemn all the Sacraments of the Church. Concerning the Sacrament of Baptism, they say, that the Catechism signifies nothing, that the Absolution pronounced over Infants avails them nothing: that the Godfathers and Godmothers do not understand, what they answer the Priest... They reject all Exorcisms and Blessings. They wonder why none but the Bishops alone should have the power to confirm. Concerning the Sacrament of the Eucharist they say, That a Priest, guilty of mortal sin, cannot celebrate that Sacrament, but that a good Lay-man, yea a Woman, if she knows the Sacramental words; may. That Transubstantiation... may be celebrated on our common Tables. *Malach. In every place shall a pure offering be offered to my name.* They condemn the Custom of Believers communicating no more than once a Year, whereas they communicate daily. That Transubstantiation is performed by words utter'd in the vulgar Tongue. That the Mass signifies nothing: that the Apostles knew nothing of it, and that it is only done for gain. They reject the Canon of the Mass, and only make use of the words of Christ in their vulgar Tongue... They despise Canonical hours. That the offering made by the Priest in the Mass, is of no value... They say, concerning the Sacrament of Penance, that none can be absolved by a wicked Priest. That a good Lay-man hath the power of absolving; and that they by laying on of their hands can forgive sins, and conferr the Holy Ghost. That it is much better to confess to a good Laick, than to a wicked Priest. That no heavy penances ought to be imposed, according to the Example of Christ, who said to the Woman taken in Adultery, *Go thy way, and sin no more.* All public Penances and Chains they disapprove of, especially in Women. That a general Confessions ought not to be made every year. They condemn the Sacrament of Marriage, declaring, That those who enter into the state of Marriage without hope of Children, are guilty of mortal sin. *Compaternity*, they say, signifies nothing, as to the hindring of Marriage, neither have they any regard to the degrees of Carnal or Spiritual Affinity, which the Church observes, nor to the impediments of order and publick decency, or to the prohibition of the Church in that matter... That it was a error of the Church, to forbid the Clergy to Marry; whereas the same is allowed of by the Eastern Church; That it is no sin in those who are continent, to kiss or embrace. They disallow the Sacrament of Extream Unction, because the same is only given to the Rich, and because many Priests are necessary to administer it. They hold the Sacrament of Orders to be of no use, because every good Lay-man is a Priest; the Apostles themselves being all Lay-men. That the preaching of a wicked Priest, cannot profit any Body. That what is uttered in the Latin Tongue, can be of no use to Lay-men. They mock at the tonsure of the Priests. They reproach the Church that raiseth Bastards, Boys and notorious sinners to high Ecclesiastical Dignities. That every Lay-man, yea and Woman too may preach. *Corinth. For you may all*

Prophesie one by one, that all may be edified. Whatsoever is preached without Scripture proof, they account no better than Fables. That the Holy Scripture is of the same efficacy in the vulgar Tongue as in Latin, and accordingly they communicate, and administer the Sacraments in the Vulgar Tongue. They can say a great part of the Old and New Testament by hear. They despise the Decretals, and the Sayings, and Expositions of Holy Men, and only cleave to the Text of Scripture. They contemn Excommunication, neither do they value Absolution which they expect from God alone. They reject the Indulgences of the Church, deride Dispensations, neither do they believe any irregularity. They admit none for Saints save only the Apostles; they pray to no Saint. They contemn the Canonization, Translation, and the Vigils of the Saints... They never read the Litany. They give no credit to the Legends of the Saints, and make a mock of the Saints Miracles. They despise the Reliques of the Saints. They abhor the wood of the Holy Cross, because of Christ's suffering on it, neither do they sign themselves with it. That the doctrine of Christ and the Apostles, is sufficient to Salvation, without any Church Statutes and Ordinances. That the Traditions of the Church, are no better than the Traditions of the Pharisees; and that greater stress is laid on the Observation of humane Tradition, than on the keeping of the Law of God. *Matth. Why do ye transgress the Law of God by your Traditions?* 'They refuse the mystical tense/sense of Scripture, especially in Saying and Actions traditionally delivered and published by the Church.

Their Errors of a third rank are there; They contemn all approved Ecclesiastical Customs, which they do not read of in the Gospel, as the Observation of Candlemas, Palm Sunday, the Reconciliation of Penitents, the Adoration of the Cross on Good-Friday. They despise the feast of *Easter*, and all other Festivals of Christ and the Saints, because of their being multiplied to that vast number, and say, that one day is as good as another, and work upon Holy days, where they can do it, without being taken notice of. They disregard the Church-Fasts, alledging that of *Isai. 58. Is this the Fast that I have chosen?* 'They deride and mock at all Dedications, Consecrations, and Benedictions of Candles, Ashes, Palm-branches, Oil, Fire, Wax-candles, *Agnus Dei*, Women after Child-bearing, Strangers, Holy places and Persons, Vestments, Salt and Water. They look upon the Church, built of Stone, to be no better than a common Barn... neither do they believe that God dwells there, *Acts 17. God doth not dwell in temples made with hands:* 'And that Prayer is made in them, is of no greater efficacy, than those which we offer up in our Closets, *Matth. 6. But thos when thou prayest enter into thy closet.* They have no value for the Dedication of Churches, and call the Ornaments of the Altar, *the sin of the Church*, and that it were much better to clothe the Poor, that to deck the Walls. They say concerning the Altar, That it is wastefulness to let so much cloath rotting upon Stones, and that Christ never gave to his Disciples Vests, nor Rockets, nor Miters. They celebrate the Eucharist in their Household Cups, and say, that the *Corporal* or Cloth on which the Host is laid, is no holier that the Cloth of their Breeches... Holy Water they esteem no better than common Water. The Images and Pictures in the Church they declare to be Idolatry.... They say that the singing by day and by night, is a thing lately instituted by *Gregory*, which in former times was not used in the Church.... That the Offices for the deceased, Masses for the dead, Offerings, Funeral Poms, Last Wills, Legacies, visiting of Graves, the reading of Vigils, anniversary Masses and other like Suffrages, are of no advantage to the Souls of the deceased.... They hold all these Errors, because they deny Purgatory, saying, that there are no more than two ways, the one of the Elect to Heaven; the other of the damned to Hell. *Eccies. 11. Which way soever the tree falleth, there it must be.* That a good Man stands in no need of any Intercessions, and that they cannot profit those

that are wicked. That all sins are mortal, and none at all venial. That once praying of the Lord's Prayer, is of more efficacy, than the ringing of ten Bells, yea than the Mass it self. That all swearing is a mortal sin, *Matth. But I say unto you, Swear not at all, but let your communication be yea, yea, and nay, nay.* They think it is an Oath to say *Verily* or *Certainly*, thereby to excuse himself from sin, that he may not divulge secrets: yea they account him worse than a Murderer, that compels another to swear....”

APPENDIX E

Boyer, P. The history of the Vaudois: Wherein is shewn their Original; how God has preserved the Christian religion among them in its purity, from the time of the apostles, to our days; the wonders he has done for their preservation, with the signal and miraculous victories that they have gained over their enemies; how they were dispersed and their churches ruined; and how at last they were re-established, beyond the expectation and hope of all the World. London: Edward Mory, 1692, 11-13.

“Above all the purity of the Religion appeared by that excellent profession of their Faith, made in the year 1120, more than 50 years before *Waldo of Lyons*. The Articles are as follow.

- I. *We believe and firmly hold all that is contained in the twelve Articles of the Symbol of the Apostles, holding for Heresie all doctrine that does not agree with the foresaid Articles.*
- II. *We believe in one God, Father, Son and Holy Ghost.*
- III. *We hold for Holy and Canonical Scriptures the Books of the Holy Bible; the five Books of Moses, which are, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 Samuel, 2 Samuel, 1 of King, 2 of King, 1 of Cronicles, 2 of Cronicles, 1 Esdras, Nehemiah, Esther, Job, the book of Psalms, the Proverbs of Solomon, Ecclesiastes, the Song of Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, the Lamentations of Jeremiah, Ezechiel, Daniel Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonas, Micah, Nahum, Habbakkuk, Sophoniah, Hagge, Zachariah, Malachiah.*

After the following Apocryphal Books, which are not received by the Jews, but we read them, as Jerome says in his Preface to the Proverbs, for the instruction of the people, but not to confirm the authority of Ecclesiastical Doctrine. The Apocryphal Books are as follow.

The third of Esdras, the fourth of Esdras, Tobie, Judith, wisdom, Ecclesiasticus, Baruc, with the Epistle of Jeremiah, Esther from the tenth Chapter to the end; the History of Susanna, the History of the Dragon, the first of Maccabees, the second of Maccabees.

The Books of the New Testament. The Gospel of St. Matthew, of St. Mark, St. Luke and St. John, The Acts of the Apostles, the Epistle of St. Paul to the Romans, the first to the Corinthians, the second to the Corinthians, to the Galatians, to the Ephesians, to the Philippians, to the Colossians, the 1 to the Thessalonians, the 2 to the Thessalonians, the 1 to Timothy, the 2 to Timothy, to Titus, to Philemon, to the Hebrews, the first Epistle of St. Peter, the second Epistle of St. Peter, the first Epistle of St. John, the Epistle of St. Jude, the Revelations of St. John.
- IV. *The foresaid Books teach this, That there is one God Almighty, all wisdom and goodness, and who by his power has created all things; who made Adam according to his own Image, but by the malice of the Devil, and the disobedience of Adam, sin entred into the World; and that we are sinners in Adam, and by Adam.*
- V. *That it was promised to the Fathers who received the Law, that by the Law knowing their sins, and their own defect of Justice, and their inability of keeping*

it, that they should desire the coming of Christ, to satisfie for their sins, and to accomplish the Law in his own person.

- VI. *That Christ was born at the time ordained by the father, viz. when all iniquity abounded, and not for the good works of any, for all were sinners.*
- VII. *That Christ is truth, life, justice, peace, our pastor, advocate, oblation, sacrificer, that he is dead for the salvation of all believers, and that he rose for their justification.*
- VIII. *Likewise we firmly believe that there is no other advocate of mediator for us sinners to the Father but Jesus Christ, and that the blessed Virgin was holy, humble, full of grace, and the same we believe of all other Saints; and that they expect in heaven the resurrection of the body at the day of Judgment.*
- IX. *Item, We believe that after this life that there are but two plaves, one for those that are saved, which we call Paradise, and another for those that are damned, which we call Hell; totally renouncing the doctrine of Purgatory, invented by Antichrist and his Ministers.*
- X. *Item, we have always believed that it was an abomination, of which we ought not to speak in the presence of God, and invented by men, viz. the doctrine of Feasts and Vigils, of Saint, of Holy Water, of abstinence from flesh and other meats upon certain days; and above all the doctrine of the Mass.*
- XI. *We have in abomination humane traditions, as being Antichristian, and of great prejudice to the liberty of the Spirit.*
- XII. *We believe that the Sacraments are the signs or visible forms of holy things, believing that from time to time the faithful should make use of those holy signs of visible forms if they can; but nevertheless we believe that the faithful may be saved if they never received the foresaid signs or visible forms, when they could not have an opportunity of receiving them.*
- XIII. *We never knew of any other Sacraments than Baptism and the Supper of our Lord.*
- XIV. *We owe honour to all superiour powers, in paying them subjection, obedience and tribute with alacrity.*

It's now 570 years since this confession of Faith was made by the Churches of *Piemont*, at which time all other Churches were corrupted, by the mixture of humane doctrine and Pagan Ceremonies; the world at that time being overspread with an *Aegyptian* darkness, and so the Authors of both Religions agree, in calling that age the dark age.

This confession of Faith being drawn from the writings of the holy Apostles, and in every respect conformable to their Doctrine, it follows, by a necessary consequence that the Religion of the *Vaudois* is the true and pure Religion of the Apostles, and that they have always kept it pure from the first receiving of it till the beginning of the eleventh age, and from thence till these times, since, they now profess the same Faith, and teach the same Doctrine that was contained in that famous confession.”

APPENDIX F

Cameron, Euan. *Waldenses: Rejection of Holy Church in Medieval Europe*. Malden: Blackwell, 2000, 246-250.

The Angrogna Propositions of 12 September 1532: Decisions of the Synod of Chanforan

The propositions which were disputed in Angrogna the year of our Lord 1532. And the 12th day of September. In the presence of all the ministers and also of the people. The first day it was disputed whether it is lawful to a Christian to swear in any way.

C. 1 The Christian may lawfully swear in the name on God without acting against the words which are written in St Matthew, Chapter 5. The conclusion is established in this way, that someone who swears does not take the name of God in vain, so that he may swear. He does not take the name of God in vain when his oath redounds to the greater glory of God and the benefit of his neighbour and God; one may swear in a court of law, because one who holds authority, whether he is faithful or unfaithful, exercises the authority of God, and by this reason in a certain way the oath is given. We intend to swear by the name of God etc.

C. 2 No work is called good save that which God has commanded. No work is called evil save that which God has forbidden. As far as concerns external works which are not forbidden by God, a man may do them or not according to the conclusion given without sin, etc. The first two propositions are known for themselves by faithful people intuitively. You shall not do all those things which seem well done in your sight, but shall do that which I command you, to the end of the chapter. You shall do only and alone that which I command you, neither adding nor removing anything to my word, but do only all that which I command you. You shall not turn away to the right or the left; do only that which I command you, and that shall be your rule in all your external works; you may do all things as far as external works of whatsoever kind they are. In this way, that they may not lead you to go against the commandment of God which is that of love. Nor also against that which is forbidden, that is not to do to our neighbour that which you would not wish to be done to yourself.

C. 5 [sic] Auricular confession is not commanded by God. It is concluded according to Holy Scripture that the true confession of a Christian is to confess to God alone, to whom belongs honour and glory. And to him likewise only is confession etc. The second confession is to be reconciled to one's neighbour, as we see in St Matthew chapter 5, and St James last chapter, we confess etc. The third is in St Matthew 18, about someone who sins in regard of me: that is, that I knowing that I ought to go to him, and not him to me. And if he does not wish to be corrected neither by me, nor by testimonies, nor even by the whole congregation. And thus since he has publicly sinned, publicly he has to confess his sin. Other manner of confession we do not find in the Holy Scripture etc.

C. 6 The cessation of work on Sundays is not forbidden by God to a Christian. The conclusion is reached that even though a person may work on a Sunday without sin, as we find in the Gospels. And also in Galatians in the 4th chapter, and Colossians in the 2nd

chapter, nevertheless to show our charity to our servants. And also to take time for the Word of God we ought to stop work on that day as one who respects the honour and glory of God.

C. 7 Words are not necessary for prayer.

C. 8 Kneeling down, or specific hours, or uncovering of the head or other external things are not necessary or required in prayer. It is concluded that divine worship may not be done unless in spirit and in truth, as we find in St John in the 4th chapter: God is spirit and one who wishes to speak with him, it is necessary that he speaks with the spirit. Words and other external things do nothing save to express and demonstrate great affection for one's neighbour etc. like that which someone has towards God.

C. 9 The imposition of hands is not necessary. The conclusion is reached that for all that the apostles used it. And the ancient fathers: nevertheless because it is an external thing, it will be in the free choice of each person.

C. 10 It is not lawful for a Christian to take revenge on his enemy in any manner whatsoever. The present proposition is clear of itself, as we find in St Matthew in the 5th chapter. And St Paul Romans 12, and Saint Peter in the first etc.

C. 11 The Christian can exercise magistracy over Christians who are criminals. The proposition is clear as we find in St Paul Romans 13, Corinthians 6, and St Peter in his first epistle.

C. 12 The Christian does not have fixed times when he must fast. This is clear through the whole of Scripture, because it is not found that God has commanded it.

C. 13 Marriage is not forbidden to anyone of whatsoever order they may be.

C. 14 Whosoever forbid marriage to those whom they wish teach a devilish doctrine.

C. 15 To establish a state or order of virginity is a devilish doctrine.

C. 16 Someone who does not have the gift of continency is obliged to marry.

The conclusions are sufficiently clear in so far as concerns doctrine: first we have Genesis in that it is not good for any man to be alone. The second is clear as we find in St Paul, 1 Timothy chapter 4. The third moreover is manifest because it is without foundation in Scripture. The fourth is most true, as Paul writes to the Corinthians in the 7th chapter of the first epistle.

C. 17 Not all usury is forbidden by God. This is clear because God did not forbid it save for that usury which harms one's neighbour, as it is contained in the law not to do to another that which you would not wish to be done to yourself.

C. 18 The words which are in St Luke 'give' etc., do not refer to usury.

The proposition is clear because Christ did not mean anything other than to teach only the manner which we ought to keep with our neighbour, and to lend one to the other in

the office of charity which we ought to practice one to another: that is, that he ought not only lend to the poor but also to give if necessity requires it.

C. 19 All those who are already and will be saved were pre-elected before the foundation of the world.

C. 20 Those who are saved cannot be not saved.

The first is clear as we find in St Paul to the Ephesians chapter 1. The second also in Romans in the 8th and 9th chapters.

Whosoever would establish free will denies entirely the predestination and the grace of God. This is more than clear as we find in Romans, also throughout the epistle to the Galatians, also through all that to the Ephesians...

C. 22 [sic] The ministers of the Word of God ought not to move from place to place unless this may of great utility to the Church.

C. 23 For the ministers to have some private goods to nourish their families is not contrary to apostolic sharing of goods.

These two conclusions are clear as we find in the Acts of the Apostles.

Around the matter of the sacraments, it is concluded by the Scripture that we have only two sacramental signs which Christ has left: one is baptism, the other is the Eucharist, which we use as a demonstration of our perseverance in the faith which we have promised in baptism when we were children; and also in memory of that great benefit which Jesus Christ has done for us by dying for our redemption, and washing us with his precious blood.

Therefore, brethren, since it has been the good pleasure of God to gather us together through his most holy Scripture; and that with his help we have come to take a declaration of the present conclusion, in everything we are united and of one same spirit. And publicly they have been expounded not as commanded by men but as commanded by the Holy Spirit, as they truly are. Therefore should we perjure ourselves in the bowels of that charity, if after we have shared it together, we were discordant in teaching, both in the conclusions stated above, as also in the interpretation of the Scripture: and so, as one same Spirit has composed it, let us ensure that it is interpreted by that same Spirit.

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