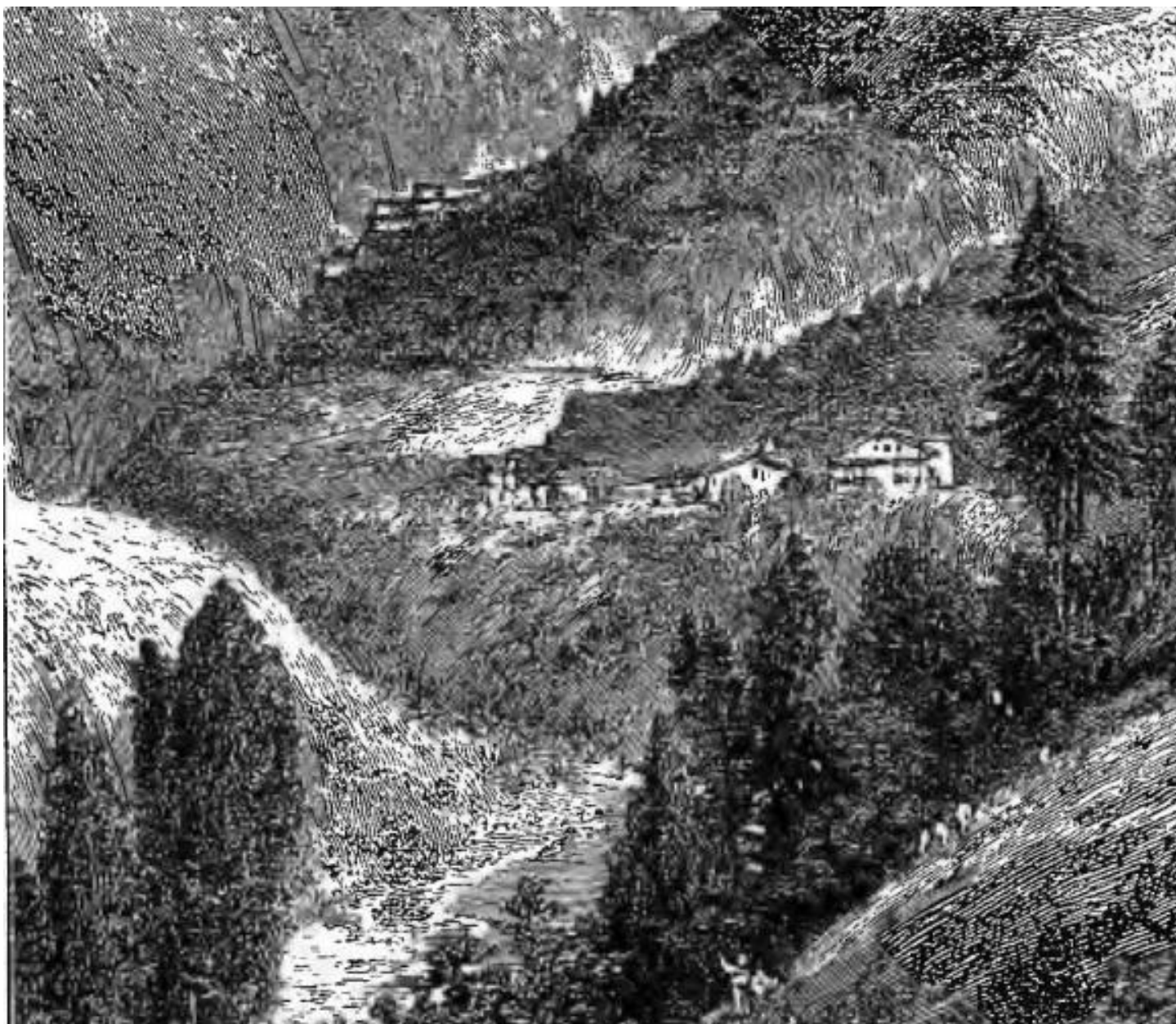




THE WALDENSES WERE INDEPENDENT BAPTISTS

An Examination of the Doctrines of this Medieval Sect

Thomas Williamson

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INTRODUCTION

Of the numerous pre-Reformation sects which dissented from the Roman Catholic Church in Europe during the Middle Ages, the most famous, and the only sect to survive until modern times, is that of the Waldenses, who were also known as Vaudois and by various other names. Their homeland was in the valleys of the Alps in northwestern Italy and adjacent portions of southeastern France, but from these valleys they spread into most if not all the countries of Europe.

It is common for modern historians to trace the origin of the Waldenses to one founder, Peter Waldo of Lyons, France, who began the movement about 1160 A.D. However, many careful church historians have taken the view that the Waldenses existed for many centuries prior to Waldo, and that they were named for the valleys in which they lived, not for Waldo. They take the view that Waldo's movement merely merged into an already existing Waldensian sect, rather than giving rise to that sect. Those historians also tend to believe that the original Waldenses can be traced back to the Novatian movement of the 3rd Century, and from there back to the Apostolic Age.

Such authors and historians as Monastier, Jones, Robinson, Jarrel, Morland, Leger, Christian, Faber, Allix, Gilly, Comba, Nolan, Wilkinson, Montgomery, Newman, Waller, Ray, Wylie, Broadbent, Overbey, Nevins, Orchard and Jonathan Edwards are on record as affirming the existence of the Waldenses prior to the time of Peter Waldo, and many of these authorities regard the Waldenses as an important link in the chain of transmission of apostolic truth from the time of Christ to the era of the Reformation and the present day. Many Baptist authors, too numerous to mention, who believe in a form of Baptist succession or perpetuity over the last 2000 years, have claimed the Waldenses as Baptists, an assertion which, if true, conveniently bridges a gap of 1200 years between the Baptists of Constantine's time and the Anabaptists of the Reformation era.

This writer fully accepts the view that the Waldenses predate Peter Waldo and that they represent a strain of evangelical belief that can be traced back to the

time of Constantine. However, there is a problem with the claim that the Waldenses were Baptists. The problem is that those of the Reformed theological persuasion have also claimed the Waldenses as a Reformed party. It is admitted by all that the Waldenses of present-day Italy are not Baptists, that they are now Reformed Pedobaptists, and that they have been so for about 450 years, since the time of the Reformation. If we are to claim the Waldenses as Baptists, then the burden of proof is on Baptists to examine the doctrinal beliefs of the Waldenses prior to the Reformation, to establish that those beliefs and practices were fundamentally Baptist, and to explain when and why the Waldenses ceased to be Baptists.

The purpose of this dissertation is to conduct an objective examination of Waldensian belief and practice, without any preconceived or predetermined conclusions, to see if there is any scholarly basis for the statements commonly made by Baptist historians that the Waldenses were Baptists. Unless otherwise noted, all of our quotations, and conclusions based on those quotations, will have reference to pre-Reformation or medieval Waldenses.

In order to show that there were true Baptist churches in the Middle Ages, under the banner of the Waldenses, it is not necessary to prove that all of the churches of that name, in all places, were Baptist at any given time, or that they were Baptist at all points in their history. If it can be shown that only some of the Waldenses were truly Baptist, this will prove our point. Similarly, if we wished to prove the existence of Baptists in 20th-Century America, we could freely admit that many in that era who called themselves Baptist were not truly Baptist in faith and practice, and that many so-called Baptists indulged in seriously heterodox beliefs, such as denial of Biblical inerrancy, that would disqualify them as true Baptist believers. This admission would in no way disprove the thesis that some true Baptist churches did exist in 20th-Century America.

In our references to Waldensian doctrine and practice, it will be understood that our statements are generalizations which would not always be accurate as to all who called themselves Waldenses, or were called that by their enemies, in all times and places. In many cases evidence can be cited to show that some Waldenses believed the opposite of what we will present, but this does not weaken our case. The two statements, "Many 20th-Century American Baptists believed in Biblical inerrancy," and "Many 20th-Century American Baptists rejected Biblical inerrancy," are both accurate, and the fact that some Baptists became apostate, whether in the 13th Century or the 20th, in no way disproves the existence of other Baptists and Baptist churches that remained true to the faith. Jarrel gives us a good key for understanding

different statements about the Waldenses that appear to be in hopeless conflict:

There is so much evidence that, in this period, there were parties of different characters, known as Waldenses, that we must recognize different beliefs and practices among them. This will readily harmonize the different documents, showing some Waldenses of this period remained in the church of Rome; some separated from it; some were never in it; some may have had infant baptism and other Romish trumpery, while most of them were Baptist. [1]

With these understandings in mind, we will examine various aspects of Waldensian doctrine and practice which would be of interest to Baptists today, to determine whether the medieval Waldenses can honestly be regarded as Baptists. Because a proper understanding of the ordinance of baptism is crucial in determining whether a church or sect can be called Baptist, we will explore that subject first.

[1] W.A. Jarrel, *Baptist Church Perpetuity*, Dallas, published by the author, 1894, p. 161.

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CHAPTER ONE

MODE OF BAPTISM - DID THE WALDENSES IMMERSE?

It is necessary to consider the question of the mode of baptism used by the Waldenses, because if they did not baptize by immersion, then they were not Baptists, regardless of the other evangelical characteristics they may have had. One misconception we must avoid is the idea that since the Roman Catholic Church employs sprinkling as the mode of baptism today, therefore the Catholic Church ordinarily sprinkled during the Middle Ages. This idea is incorrect. There can be no doubt that immersion was the mode of baptism commonly used in the Catholic Church up to at least the 14th Century. Everts

cites the teaching of Aquinas, one of the most prominent Catholic theologians of the 13th Century, on this subject:

Thomas Aquinas, the chief of the schoolmen, who flourished about the year 1250, says, in his theology, that while immersion is not essential to the validity of baptism, still, as the old and common usage, it is more commendable and safer than pouring. [\[1\]](#)

Christian affirms the same point:

It is equally clear that the form of baptism was immersion. This was at the time, the practice of the whole Christian world. The great Roman Catholic writers affirm that immersion was the proper form of baptism. Peter the Lombard, who died A.D. 1164, declared without qualification for it as the proper act of baptism. Thomas Aquinas refers to immersion as the general practice of his day, and prefers it as the safer way, as did also Bonaventura and Duns Scotus. [\[2\]](#)

Since the predominant mode of baptism in the Roman Catholic Church was immersion, at least until the 14th Century, the burden of proof would definitely rest on those who would propose that the Waldenses innovated with different modes of baptism, such as sprinkling, before sprinkling came into general practice in the Church of Rome. All the evidence we have indicates that the Waldenses shared with their Catholic contemporaries in the practice of immersion. Jarrel says:

The Waldenses were Baptists in that they practiced only immersion. To all who are familiar with church history it is well known there was no affusion till the middle of the third century, and that from that time to the Reformation immersion was the rule and affusion allowed only in cases of sickness - called "clinic baptism." . . . While "clinic baptism" was practiced by the Romish Church it was never sanctioned by any council until sanctioned by the Council of Ravenna, A.D. 1311. . . . Living in an age in which immersion was the universal law and the custom . . . and practicing only believer's baptism, rejecting, as we will see, water salvation, that the Waldenses were Baptists as to the action of baptism is the inevitable conclusion. . . . Mezeray says, "In the 12th Century they (Waldenses) plunged the candidate in the sacred font." [\[3\]](#)

If the early Waldensian literature lacks clear references as to their mode of baptism, this is explained by the fact that that question was not a matter of controversy between them and their Catholic enemies. Robinson says:

The first writers against the Vaudois never censured their mode of baptizing, for in those times all parties administered baptism by dipping, except in cases of danger. [4]

Concerning Peter Waldo, the supposed founder of the Waldenses, Jarrel quotes another authority:

Samuel Schmucker says of the Baptists: "As a sect they never existed . . . until the rise of Peter Waldo in the twelfth century who established the sect of the Waldenses among the mountains of Piedmont. One of the most prominent doctrines of him and his followers was the impropriety of the baptism of infants and necessity of immersion to the validity of baptism." [5]

Although many researchers would disagree with the notion that there were no Baptists or Waldenses before the 12th Century, we can heartily agree with the conclusion that the early Waldenses practiced immersion. Christian says:

The contemporary writers, Eberhard and Ermengard, in their work "contra Waldenses" written toward the close of the 12th Century, repeatedly refer to immersion as the form of baptism among the Waldenses. [6]

Concerning the 15th-Century Bohemian Waldenses, Broadbent says:

One of the first things they (the Czech Brethren) did was to baptize those present, for the baptism of believers by immersion was common to the Waldenses and to most of the brethren in different parts, though it had been interrupted by pressure of persecution. [7]

We can conclude this subject with the words of Ray:

No historian has ever charged the ancient Waldenses with the practice of sprinkling and pouring for baptism. We may consider it a point generally admitted that the ancient Waldenses possessed the Baptist peculiarity of holding the burial in baptism of those who are dead to sin. [8]

[1] Rev. W.W. Everts, Jr., *The Church in the Wilderness, or The Baptists Before the Reformation*, Nappanee, Indiana, Baptist Bookshelf, 1986, p. 37.

[2] John T. Christian, *A History of the Baptists*, Texarkana, Bogard Press, 1922, vol. 1, p. 81.

[3] Jarrel, op. cit., pp. 162-163.

[4] Robert Robinson, *Ecclesiastical Researches*, Gallatin, Tennessee, Church History Research and Archives, 1984, p. 468.

[5] Jarrel, op. cit., p. 311.

[6] Christian, op. cit., vol. 1, pp. 81-82.

[7] E.H. Broadbent, *The Pilgrim Church*, Southampton, England, Camelot Press, 1985, p. 130.

[8] David Burcham Ray, *The Baptist Succession*, Gallatin, Tennessee, Church History Research and Archives, 1984, p. 331.

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CHAPTER TWO

INFANT BAPTISM - WERE THE WALDENSES PEDOBAPTISTS?

Having established that the Waldenses baptized by immersion, that is not sufficient to establish that they were Baptists, any more than the practice of immersion by such heterodox modern sects as the Mormons would qualify them to be regarded as Baptists. Perhaps the most obvious example of a non-Baptist yet immersionist church body would be the Greek Orthodox Church, which practiced baptism by immersion throughout the Middle Ages, and still does today, but also has practiced and continues to practice infant baptism.

If we are to regard the Waldenses as Baptists, we must firmly establish it as a fact that the Waldensian movement, at least in part, rejected infant baptism and insisted on baptism of believers only. This is especially necessary in light of the fact that the modern Waldenses are Pedobaptists.

Fortunately, we have the testimony of an eyewitness to the Waldensian movement of the 13th Century, Reinerius Saccho, who was a Roman Catholic

inquisitor and persecutor of the Waldenses. Prior to becoming a Catholic, he was himself a Waldensian for 17 years. If anyone would know whether or not the Waldenses baptized infants, surely Reinerius would know. This is his accusation against the Waldenses in his book, "Of the Sects of Modern Heretics," published in 1254.

Secondly, they condemn all the Sacraments of the Church; in the first place, as to baptism, they say that the Catechism is nothing - also, that the ablution which is given to infants profits nothing. [1]

Everts also refers to the testimony of Reinerius Saccho:

Reinerius, a renegade Waldensian preacher, turned inquisitor, informs us of their practice in Italy. He says they discarded godfathers and confirmations, and denounced infant baptism as a useless ablution. To the same effect Richinius affirms, that in their opinion baptism was neither necessary nor useful for infants.[2]

There are numerous references showing that the medieval Waldenses were accused of rejecting infant baptism by their enemies. Concerning the followers of the 11th-Century French reformer Berenger, or Berengarius, we are told:

On his followers being examined, they said, "Baptism did not profit children." Many Berengarians suffered death for their opinions, and for opposing infant baptism. Bellarmine says, "the Berengarians admitted only adults to baptism, which error the Anabaptists embraced. . . . Berengarius and Vaudois were equivalent terms." [3]

In 1025, the French Bishop Gerard made the same accusation, according to Allix:

When Bishop Gerard, of Arras and Cambray, charged the Waldenses with abhorring (Catholic) baptism, they said baptism added nothing to our justification, and a strange will, a strange faith, and a strange confession, do not seem to belong to, or be of any advantage to a little child, who neither wills, nor runs, who knows nothing of faith, and is altogether ignorant of his own good and salvation, in whom there can be no desire of regeneration, and from whom no confession of faith can be expected. [4]

Orchard multiplies references from Roman Catholics who complained of the Waldensian rejection of infant baptism:

The Lateran Council of 1139 did enforce infant baptism by severe measures, and successive councils condemned the Waldenses for rejecting it. (Wall) Evervinus of Stanfield complained to Bernard, Abbot of Clairval, that Cologne was infected with Waldensian heretics, who denied baptism to infants. (Allix) Peter, Abbot of Clugny, wrote against the Waldenses, on account of their denying infant baptism. (Ivimey) Bernard, the saint, the renowned Abbot of Clairval, says, the Albigenses and Waldenses administer baptism only to the adults. They do not believe infant baptism. . . . Ecbertus Schonaugiensis, who wrote against this people, declares, They say that baptism does no good to infants; therefore, such as come over to their sect, they baptize in a private way; that is, without the pomp and public parade of the catholics. (Wall) . . . Alexander III, in council condemned the Waldensian or Puritan heresy, for denying baptism to infants. (Danvers) Alanus Magnus states that they denied the ordinance to children. [5]

Armitage says:

Almost all Roman Catholic writers agree with Cardinal Hosius, who says: "The Waldenses rejected infant baptism." Addis and Arnold declare of them: "As to baptism, They said that the washing of infants was of no avail to them." . . . Ermengard, about A.D. 1192, says: "They pretend that this sacrament cannot be conferred except upon those who demand it with their own lips; hence they infer the other error, that baptism does not profit infants who receive it." . . . Stephen of Borbone says, A.D. 1225: "One argument of their error is, that baptism does not profit little children to their salvation, who have neither the motive nor the act of faith, as it is said in the latter part of Mark, he who will not believe will be condemned." . . . Moneta, the Dominican, who wrote before A.D. 1240: "They maintain the nullity of the baptism of infants, and affirm that no one can be saved before attaining the age of reason." . . . One of the Austrian Inquisitors, A.D. 1260: "Concerning baptism, some err in saying that little children are not saved by baptism, for the Lord says, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved. Now, a child does not yet believe, consequently is not saved." (By baptism, he must mean.) "Some of them baptize over again, others lay on hands without baptism." David of Augsburg, A.D. 1256-1272: "They say that a man is then truly, for the first time, baptized, when he is brought into their heresy. But some say that baptism does not profit little children, because they are never able actually to believe." [6]

Waller cites these authorities:

Bishop Usher, on the authority of Koveden's Annals, states, that in the year 1176, the "Boni homines of Toulouse," (a name given to the Waldenses), were summoned before a meeting of bishops, abbots, etc., and required to recant their errors by subscribing to a creed drawn up for the purpose. In the creed was the following article: "We believe also that no person is saved but he that is baptized: and that infants are saved by baptism." Being urged to subscribe and swear to this creed, they positively and perseveringly refused. . . . The Book of Sentences of the inquisition of Toulouse informs us, that the Waldenses hold, "that baptism by water administered by the church is of no use to children, because the children, so far from giving assent to it, cried at it." [7]

As late as the 16th Century, Cardinal Hosius made the same accusation against the Waldenses:

Cardinal Hosius, who presided at the Council of Trent, and wrote a history of the heresy of his own times, says, the Waldenses rejected infant baptism, and re-baptized all who embraced their sentiments. [8]

So far we have heard only from the enemies of the Waldenses, who appear to have been unanimous in declaring that they rejected infant baptism. But suppose this was a false accusation, intended to blacken the reputation of the Waldenses and make them odious as the deniers of salvation to babies? After all, the Waldenses were also accused of being Manichaeans, a charge that we will see later on was false.

It is quite evident, though, that the charge that the medieval Waldenses rejected infant baptism must have been true, because they suffered great persecutions as a result of that belief, and there is no record that they ever denied their opposition to infant baptism. The Waldenses could have spared themselves many severe tribulations at the hands of the Inquisition over the centuries, had they merely spoken up and said, "Yes, we do believe in infant baptism." But there is no evidence that they ever did. Waller says:

If the charge of infant baptism was a calumny, it was one constantly and universally persisted in by their enemies for centuries; and one which the Waldenses, nor any portion of them, until after the Reformation and after their own acknowledged deflection from the doctrine of their fathers, ever denied. [9]

Concerning this point, Ray tells us:

It is conceded as a fact, by all candid historians, that the Roman Catholics not only accused the Waldenses of neglecting infant baptism, but they waged constant persecution against them in order to force them to baptize their infants. This would not have been the case had the Waldenses been Pedo-baptists. [10]

Orchard concurs that the charge of anti-pedobaptistic convictions made against the Waldenses was correct:

In those bulls of popes and decrees of councils, year after year for centuries, we see the charge maintained against them, of neglecting infant baptism, without the shadow of evidence that this charge was improperly made against any portion of this people. Nor is there any document or testimony, quoted by Pedobaptists of this period, showing that the Waldenses as a body were wrongly charged in this affair. [11]

Those who survey the available literature on the medieval Waldenses will find that the only references to infant baptism among them describe the practice of some compromisers who, under the pressure of intense persecution, took their infant children to the Catholic priests for baptism, in order that they might appear to conform to the Catholic system. Not all Waldenses fell into this dissimulation, and there are no clear references showing that the Waldenses baptized their infants themselves. Even if some of them did, this would in no way detract from the fact that many Waldenses rejected infant baptism.

Now that we have heard from the enemies of the Waldenses, let us hear from the Waldenses themselves concerning their views on infant baptism. Infant baptism is denounced in a treatise on Antichrist, dating from the 12th Century, which was preserved among the Waldenses of the Alps, and brought to England by Samuel Morland, who was Oliver Cromwell's ambassador to the court of Savoy until 1658. Morland dates the manuscript from the time of the French evangelical preacher Peter of Bruys, and perhaps it was written by him. The evidence here is especially valuable since it was published by Morland, who was a Pedobaptist and wrote for an audience that was persuaded that the Waldenses had always been of the Reformed faith; thus, Morland cannot be accused of any partiality towards the Baptists. The manuscript reads:

The third work of Antichrist consists in this, that he attributed the regeneration of the Holy Spirit unto the dead outward work, baptizing children in that faith, and teaching that thereby baptism and regeneration must be had. [12]

Further on in the treatise, the ancient author goes into greater detail as to what he is opposed to:

That which is of no necessity in the administration of baptism, is the exorcism, the breathing on, the sign of the cross, upon the infant's breast and forehead, the salt which they put into his mouth, the spittle put to his ears, and nose, the anointing of his breast, the capuchin, the unction on the crown of the head, and all the rest of those things consecrated by the bishop, putting wax in their hands, arraying them in white, blessing the water, plunging the infant three times, seeking for godfathers: all these things commonly practiced about the administration of this sacrament are needless, as being not at all of the substance of, nor requisite in the sacrament of baptism; these things giving but occasion to many that they rather fall into error and superstition, than that they should be edified by them to salvation; which made some doctors profess, that there was no virtue, nor benefit to be had by them. [13]

These statements appear to constitute an unmistakably clear condemnation of the practice of infant baptism. But it may be objected that modern-day Presbyterians might condemn the Roman Catholic practice of infant baptism in the same harsh terms, while practicing a different, Reformed version of infant baptism.

There is every reason to believe, however, based on the original documents presented by Morland, that the Waldenses insisted on faith as a prior condition for baptism. Consider, for instance, this article from an ancient Waldensian confession of faith:

We believe, that in the sacrament of baptism, water is the visible and external sign, which represents unto us that which (by the invisible virtue of God operating) is within us; namely, the renovation of the Spirit, and the mortification of our members in Jesus Christ; by which also we are received into the holy congregation of the people of God, there protesting and declaring openly our faith and amendment of life. [14]

Language of this kind is used by Baptists, not by Pedo-baptists. Do infants mortify their members? Do they exercise faith, or openly declare their faith in the assembly of God's people? Do they show evidence of amendment of life after they have been baptized? To apply a confessional statement of this kind to the baptism of infants would be absurd.

Then there is this question and answer preserved from an ancient Waldensian catechism:

Minister: By what marks is the undue administration of the sacrament known?

Answer: When the priests not knowing the intention of Christ in the sacraments, say, that the grace and the truth is included in the external ceremonies, and persuade men to the participation of the sacrament without the truth, and without faith. [15]

This language definitely excludes infants from participation in the ordinance of baptism, since they cannot exercise faith. Also, the Nobla Leycon, or Noble Lesson, dating from about 1100, speaks in terms of believer's baptism, which would certainly exclude baptism of infants:

They spoke without fear, of the doctrine of Christ, They preached to Jews and Greeks, working many miracles, And baptized those who believed in the name of Jesus Christ, Then was there a people new converted; they were called Christians, for they believed in Christ. [16]

The pre-Reformation confessions of faith presented by Morland, who would have had every reason and desire to present all available evidences that the Waldenses were Pedobaptists, contain no such evidences or references. In contrast, consider the clear, unequivocal language of the Westminster Confession of Faith, promulgated in 1648 (ten years before Morland wrote his book on the Waldenses) as a classic expression of Reformed convictions. These statements from Chapter 28 leave no doubt as to whether infants were to be baptized:

Not only those that do actually profess faith in and obedience unto Christ, but also the infants of one, or both, believing parents, are to be baptized. . . . The efficacy of baptism is not tied to that moment of time wherein it is administered; yet, notwithstanding, by the right use of this ordinance, the grace promised is not only offered, but really exhibited, and conferred, by the Holy Ghost, to such (whether of age or infants) as that grace belongeth unto, according to the counsel of God's own will, in His own time. [17]

If such a clear affirmation of infant baptism among the ancient Waldenses existed, it would have been brought forth by Pedobaptist scholars, but no such evidence has yet surfaced. According to Ray,

Even the learned Dr. Wall after all his efforts to find infant baptism among the Waldenses admits that in their older confessions the Waldenses say nothing about infant baptism. [18]

Not only is there a lack of affirmation of a belief in infant baptism among the early Waldenses, but there is evidence that they openly rejected that doctrine. Everts says:

The creed of the Bohemian Waldenses published in 1532 (quoted by Sterck) is equally explicit on this point of dispute: "It is clear as day that infant baptism does no good, and is not ordered by Christ, but invented by man. Christ wants His baptism based upon His word for the forgiveness of sins, and then He promises, he that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." [19]

Says Orchard:

Jacob Merning says that he had, in the German tongue, a confession of faith of the Baptists, called Waldenses, which declared the absence of infant baptism in the early churches of these people, that their forefathers practised no such thing. . . . [20]

A survey of church historians leads us to the conclusion that among the Waldenses there were many who boldly rejected infant baptism. Robinson makes these remarks:

They held some articles peculiar to the Dutch Baptists; as, that it was unlawful for a Christian to take oaths, to bear arms, to shed human blood, to baptize children, and so on. [21]

They are also distinguished from the later Vaudois, and the reformed churches . . . by not practicing infant baptism. . . . This was the account given of them after their union with the Waldenses. [22]

In regard to baptism, nothing can be determined by any writings of their own, for they published nothing. The most probable opinion is, that they baptized minors, after they had been instructed, which was the general practice in the time of Claude, and there is no positive proof, and there can be none, that they baptized babes. If, as was just now observed, their modern paper describes their ancient customs, they baptized no babes. [23]

Says Orchard:

The old, or primitive Waldenses, were distinguished by the doctrine and practice of Christian liberty. . . . They believed in the doctrine of the Trinity, and baptized believers. They refused baptism to infants, when it came into use in other churches. [24]

Says Vedder:

The balance of evidence is therefore clearly in favor of the conclusion that the early followers of Waldo taught and practiced the baptism of believers only. [25]

Says Christian:

It is possible that some of the Italian Waldenses (so-called) practiced infant baptism. . . . There is no account that the French Waldenses, or the Waldenses proper, ever practiced infant baptism. [26]

The Waldenses scattered in the Netherlands might be called their salt, so correct were their views and devout their lives. The Mennonites sprang from them. It is indubitable that they rejected infant baptism, and used only adult baptism. [27]

Says Armitage:

Some of the early members of the sect may have earnestly rejected infant baptism, while it is certain that many of the Dispersed did and practiced only the baptism of believers. [28]

Says Newman:

Many of them rejected infant baptism, as did Peter de Bruys and most of the evangelicals whom we meet in the twelfth century before Waldo. [29]

Says Cramp:

There was no uniformity among them. A number of them, particularly in the early part of their history, judged that baptism should be administered to believers only, and acted accordingly; others entirely rejected that ordinance, as well as the Lord's Supper; a third class held

to Paedobaptism. If the question relate to the Waldenses in the strict and modern sense of the term, that is, to the inhabitants of the valleys of Piedmont, there is reason to believe that originally the majority of them were Baptists, although there were varieties of opinion among them, as well as among other seceders from the Romish church. But the language of some of their confessions cannot be fairly interpreted except on Baptist principles. [30]

With these scholarly opinions before us, there can be no doubt that among those called Waldenses there were many who held to the Baptist position of rejection of infant baptism. This should not surprise us. The Waldenses were part of the same honorable tradition of evangelical dissent which produced the great French reformers, Peter of Bruys and Henry of Lausanne, in the 12th Century, and there is every reason to believe that they and their followers opposed infant baptism. Monastier says:

Peter the Venerable, abbot of Clugny, attributes to Pierre de Bruis the five following points of doctrine, which he states in his ninth letter, entitled, "Against the Petrobrussians," and addressed to the archbishop of Arles and Embrun, as well as to the bishops of Gap and Die.

1. He (Pierre de Bruis) denies that children, before they arrive at years of intelligence, can be saved by baptism, or that the faith of another person can be useful to them, since, according to those of his opinion, it is not the faith of another which saves, but the faith of the individual with baptism, according to our Lord's words: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned." [31]

Monastier also quotes from the Magdeburgh Centuriators concerning the followers of Henry of Lausanne:

The same centuriators have also extracted from the writings of Bernard the errors which he noticed in the Apostolic heretics. We translate the passage: "The Apostolicals or Henricians; their doctrines, according to St. Bernard, as far as they can be ascertained, are: 1. that infants ought not to be baptized. . . ." [32]

The cautious historian Armitage does not hesitate to embrace Peter of Bruys, Henry of Lausanne, and their followers, as Baptists, saying:

In the Petrobrussians we find a sect of Baptists for which no apology is needed. Peter of Bruis seized the entire Biblical presentation of baptism,

and forced its teaching home upon the conscience and the life, by rejecting the immersion of babes and insisting on the immersion of all believers in Christ, without any admixture of Catharistic nonsense. . . . Such a bold soul had Christ been preparing in Henry, the next brave Baptist of the Swiss valleys. [33]

The ministry of Peter and Henry created a sensation in France, as multitudes flocked to hear them preach. It is incredible that their principles, including opposition to infant baptism, should have failed to find any expression among the Waldenses, who lived in the same regions as the Petrobrussians and Henricians.

Armitage points out that evidences of opposition to infant baptism can be found throughout the early Middle Ages. One of the hotbeds of such sentiment was northwestern Italy, home of the Piedmontese Waldenses:

Infant baptism was opposed at every step. Dr. Allix speaks of a people in Turin and Milan who vehemently condemned it as an error, and the Bishop of Vercelli sorely complained of them in 945. [34]

The burden of proof definitely rests on those who would deny that any of the Waldenses opposed infant baptism. There is irrefutable evidence to show that many Waldenses held the modern Baptist position with regard to infant baptism.

[1] Brian Tierney, *The Middle Ages, Volume 1: Sources of Medieval History*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1970, p. 223. Quoted from S.R. Maitland, *History of the Albigenses and Waldenses*, 1832.

[2] Everts, op. cit., p. 46.

[3] G.H. Orchard, *A Concise History of Baptists*, Texarkana, Bogard Press, 1987, p. 180.

[4] Ibid., p. 299. Quoted from Allix, *Churches of Piedmont*, p. 95.

[5] Ibid., pp. 299-301.

[6] Thomas Armitage, *A History of the Baptists*, Watertown, Wisconsin, Baptist Heritage Press, 1988, pp. 302-303.

[7] John L. Waller, "Were the Waldenses Baptists or Pede-Baptists?," *Western Baptist Review*, January, 1849, pp. 30, 32.

[8] Orchard, op. cit., p. 304.

[9] Waller, op. cit., pp. 19-20.

[10] Ray, op. cit., p. 171.

[11] Orchard, op. cit., p. 303.

[12] Samuel Morland, *The History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piemont*, Gallatin, Tennessee, Church History Research and Archives, 1982, pp. 148-149.

[13] Ibid., p. 173.

[14] Ibid., p. 38.

[15] Ibid., p. 81.

[16] Ibid., pp. 112-113.

[17] *Westminster Confession of Faith*, Philadelphia, Great Commission Publications, n.d., p. 17. This version of the confession is used by the Orthodox Presbyterian Church.

[18] Ray, op. cit., p. 167.

[19] Everts, op. cit., pp. 45-46.

[20] Orchard, op. cit., p. 328.

[21] Robinson, op. cit., pp. 311-312.

[22] Ibid., pp. 461-462.

[23] Ibid., pp. 470-471.

[24] Orchard, op. cit., p. 257.

[25] H.C. Vedder, *A Short History of the Baptists*, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Judson Press, 1907, pp. 126-127.

[26] Christian, op. cit., p. 77.

[27] Ibid., p. 138.

[28] Armitage, op. cit., pp. 303-304.

[29] Alfred Henry Newman, *A Manual of Church History*, Philadelphia, American Baptist Publication Society, 1899, vol. 1, p. 580.

[30] .J.M. Cramp, *Baptist History*, Watertown, Wisconsin, Baptist Heritage Publications, 1987, p. 121.

[31] Antoine Monastier, *A History of the Vaudois Church*, New York, Lane and Scott, 1849, p. 52.

[32] Ibid., p. 54.

[33] Armitage, op. cit., pp. 284, 288.

[34] Ibid., p. 247.

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CHAPTER THREE

WALDENSIAN VIEWS ON TRANSUBSTANTIATION AND OTHER ROMAN CATHOLIC DISTINCTIVES

Before we can accept the Waldenses as Baptists, we must be assured that they held to a Baptist position concerning the ordinance of the Lord's Supper as a memorial of the death of Christ. Fortunately, there is abundant evidence to show that the Waldenses held a correct view of the Lord's Supper, and rejected the sacrifice of the mass, in an age when those who held such a position were often punished with death.

Orchard assures us that the Waldenses rejected any sacerdotal interpretation of the ordinances of baptism and the Lord's Supper:

These people contended that . . . the only ordinances Christ hath appointed for the churches, are baptism and the Lord's Supper; that they are both symbolical ordinances, or signs of holy things. [1]

The ancient confessions preserved by Morland confirm for us that the Waldenses regarded the Lord's Supper as a memorial and not a sacrifice. In one confession we find this clear statement:

Article 8: We hold, that the Holy Sacrament of the table or Supper of our Lord Jesus Christ is an holy commemoration, and giving of thanks for the benefits which we have received by His death and passion. . . . [2]

In the treatise on Antichrist we are told that the eating of Christ's body was not to be regarded literally:

The manducation or eating of the Sacramental Bread is the eating of Christ's body figuratively, Christ having said, Whensoever ye do this, do it in remembrance of me. . . . [3]

Ray states that the Waldenses were close communionists, not recognizing the ordinance of the Lord's Supper as valid when conducted by other churches:

The fact that the Waldenses maintained that the only true church was among themselves, furnished evidence that they did not commune with others; for they regarded communion as a church ordinance in the kingdom of Christ; they could not, therefore, give or receive the Lord's Supper beyond the limits of the church. . . . No historian, known to me, has ever dared to assert that the ancient witnessing Waldenses were open communionists. [4]

Not only did the Waldenses positively affirm a scriptural doctrine of the Lord's Supper, but they took a strong stand against the false Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, in which the priests supposedly created God, transmuting the elements of bread and wine into the body, blood, soul and divinity of Jesus Christ. Jones assures us that Peter Waldo himself opposed and rejected that doctrine:

Men fell down before the consecrated wafer and worshipped it as God; an abomination, the absurdity and impiety of which forcibly struck the mind of Waldo, who opposed it in a most courageous manner. [5]

The 13th-Century inquisitor Reinerius Saccho accused the Waldenses of denying transubstantiation:

They do not believe the body and blood of Christ to be the true sacrament, but only blessed bread, which by a figure only is called the body of Christ, even as it is said, "and the rock was Christ." [6]

An ancient confession dated at about 1120 A.D. contains this article of Waldensian faith:

Article 10: We have always accounted as an unspeakable abomination before God, all those inventions of men, namely, the feasts and the vigils of saints, the water which they call holy, as likewise to abstain from flesh upon certain days, and the like, but especially their masses.[7]

The Bohemian Picards or Waldenses were also accused by their enemies of rejecting transubstantiation. Robinson ascribes to them this teaching:

Christ is not in the sacrament of the altar, but in heaven at the right hand of the Father to be adored. [8]

Modern historians appear to be in agreement that the denial of transubstantiation was a central doctrine of the Waldenses. Says Wylie:

They were accused, moreover, of having scoffed at the doctrine of transubstantiation. [9]

Says Bainton:

The Waldenses were widespread in southern France and were soon joined by followers in northern Italy. At first they were not heretical but merely anti-clerical. But, eventually they went so far as to maintain that sacraments administered by unworthy priests were invalid, recalling the ancient history of the Donatists. [10]

There is abundant reason to believe that the Waldenses regarded all Roman Catholic priests as unworthy to administer the Lord's Supper, not so much because of their evil manner of life, which the Waldenses exposed, but mainly because they were not part of a true church. They were accused by Reinerius Saccho, no doubt correctly, of believing that the Roman Catholic Church was not a true church:

First, they say that the Romish Church is not the Church of Jesus Christ, but a church of malignants and that it apostatized under Sylvester, when the poison of temporalities was infused into the church. And they say, that they are the church of Christ, because they observe both in word and deed, the doctrine of Christ, of the Gospel, and of the Apostles. [11]

So there can be no question that the Waldenses rejected the idea that any Catholic priest could worthily administer the Lord's Supper, let alone perform the feat of transubstantiation. Newman tells us: "They rejected the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation and insisted that Christ is present in the bread and wine only spiritually." [12]

The Waldensian rejection of the mass was one of the reasons for the fierce persecution of the Waldenses in Piedmont in the year 1655. Morland has preserved a confession of faith from that year, containing this bold statement:

15. That Jesus Christ having fully expiated our sins by His most perfect sacrifice once offered on the Cross, it neither can, nor ought to be reiterated upon any account whatsoever, as they pretend to do in the Mass. [13]

It was at this time that Waldensian denial of the efficacy of the sacrifice of the mass became an item of bitter complaint against them by the Roman Catholic Church:

The Romish clergy . . . complained to the Archbishop of Turin, that the Waldenses of the valleys of Piedmont were heretics. They alleged the following reasons: that they did not believe in the doctrines of the Church of Rome; that they made no offerings for the dead; that they did not go to mass; that they neither confessed nor received absolution; that they did not believe in purgatory, nor pay money to get the souls of their friends released. [14]

One of the most severe persecutions ever unleashed against the Waldenses took place in 1655. We are specifically told that individual Waldenses suffered and died for their refusal to attend mass. The contemporary chronicler Morland gives this account:

Jacopo di Rone, a schoolmaster of Roras, being stripped stark naked, after that they had torn off his nails with pincers, and made a thousand holes in his hands with a dagger's point, was dragged by a cord that

was fastened about his middle, through the burg of Lucerna, and every step as he marched along, one of the soldiers on one side cut off a piece of his flesh with a fauchion, and another on the other side gave him a great blow with a staff, crying in the following words . . . "Well! what sayest thou now Barbet, will thou yet go to Mass?" To which the poor creature with incredible constancy, as long as he was able to speak, made answer, . . . "Much rather death, than the Mass! Dispatch me quickly for the love of God!" [15]

This brave believer was finally beheaded by his persecutors.

Another victim of this persecution was Daniel Rambaut of Villaro, who was slowly tortured to death over a period of days, after giving to the priests this account of his convictions concerning the mass:

To believe the real presence in the host is blasphemy and idolatry. To fancy the words of consecration perform what the papists call transubstantiation, by converting the wafer and wine into the identical body and blood of Christ, which was crucified, and which afterwards ascended into heaven, is too gross an absurdity for even a child to believe, and nothing but the most blind superstition could make the Roman Catholics put confidence in anything so ridiculous. [16]

As late as 1685 we read of a congregation of Austrian Waldenses who rejected the mass, claiming to have come to that conviction without any influence from the Protestant Reformation:

In April, 1685 about 500 persons, of different sexes and ages, passed through Coire (a town in Switzerland) who gave this account of themselves. They were inhabitants of a valley in Tirol, belonging mostly to the archbishops of Saltzburgh - a remnant of the old Waldenses. They worshipped neither images nor saints; and they believed the sacrament (of the Lord's Supper) was only a commemoration of the death of Christ; and in many other points they had their opinions different from those of the church of Rome. They knew nothing of either Lutherans or Calvinists. [17]

There is abundant evidence that the Waldenses, like the later Lutherans, recognized only two of the seven Roman Catholic sacraments, baptism and the Lord's Supper, while disagreeing with the Catholics as to the significance of those two. The other sacraments were totally rejected. The Bohemian

Waldenses were accused by their enemies of holding these Catholic sacraments in contempt, believing

That the confirmation which is celebrated with anointing and extreme unction, is none of the sacraments of the church of Christ - That auricular confession is a piece of foppery - That everyone ought, in his closet, to confess his sins to God. . . . [\[18\]](#)

The confession of Angrogne in 1532 made this declaration concerning auricular confession:

Auricular confession is not commanded of God, and it hath been determined according to Holy Scriptures, that the true confession is, to confess to God alone . . . [\[19\]](#)

A 12th-Century article of faith from a Waldensian confession makes clear their attitude toward the Catholic "Seven Sacraments":

Article 13: We acknowledge no other sacrament but Baptism and the Lord's Supper. [\[20\]](#)

The Waldensian rejection of the existence of purgatory is well-documented. Morland has preserved for us a treatise from the 12th Century entitled "Of the Purgatory Dream," in which purgatory is scoffed at as a device for feeding the avarice of the priests, which was first promulgated by the popes five centuries after the time of Christ. The ancient author says:

There is not one place in all the Holy Scriptures, to show it, neither can there be any evidence produced that ever there entered any one soul in such a Purgatory, and came out again from thence. And therefore it is a thing not to be credited, nor believed. . . . It follows, there being no one express proof for it in the Law of God, that it is needless to believe the said Purgatory as an article of faith, and that there should be such a thing after this life. [\[21\]](#)

The French inquisitor Bernard Gui, writing in 1320, sweepingly describes the Waldenses as having rejected all of the traditions of the Roman Catholic Church:

Gui emphasized that the Waldensians rejected ecclesiastical authority, especially by their conviction that they were not subject to the pope or his decrees of excommunication. . . . All Catholic feast-days, festivals

and prayers were rejected as man-made and not based upon the New Testament. . . . The Waldensians denied purgatory, for which they could find no basis in the New Testament. This led them to reject the Catholic belief in the value of alms and prayers for the dead. For the Waldensians, if the dead were in hell they were beyond hope and, if in heaven, they had no need of prayer. Similar reasoning led them to reject as well prayers to images of the saints. [22]

Armitage quotes a number of ancient authorities who complained of the total rejection by the Waldenses of all Roman Catholic traditions and observances:

A Romish Inquisitor, in speaking of them, tells us: "They . . . affirm that the traditions of the Church are no better than the traditions of the Pharisees, insisting, moreover, that greater stress is laid on the observance of human tradition than on the keeping of the law of God." Seisselius, Archbishop of Turin, also states: "They receive only what is written in the Old and New Testaments." Last of all, Reinerius reports that "whatever is preached that is not substantiated by the text of the Bible they esteem fables;" for which reason Pope Pius II complains of their holding that "baptism ought to be administered without the addition of holy oil," a fact which explains the further remark of Reinerius: "They hold that none of the ordinances of the Church which have been introduced since Christ's ascension ought to be observed, as being of no value." [23]

It is admitted, of course, that over the centuries there were numerous Waldenses who sometimes submitted to the various false ordinances of the Catholic Church, including the mass, in order to avoid persecution. By the time of the Reformation this had become a common practice which was freely confessed to by the Waldensian leaders. Reinerius and many others refer to this practice, but in all references to it, it is clear that those who compromised in this manner did so with mental reservations, not believing in the efficacy of the Roman sacraments, and often muttering maledictions under their breath against the Roman Church as they presented themselves at the masses. Before we condemn these hypocrites too harshly, we should ask ourselves whether we would be willing to suffer death by slow torture, as many Waldenses did, for refusing to attend the mass.

History records that after receiving a gentle rebuke and exhortation from the Lutheran pastor Oecolampadius in 1530, urging the Waldenses against compromise, they took courage and ceased to attend the Catholic mass. Even

when they did attend the mass, they did so only under duress, while continuing to firmly reject the dogma of transubstantiation.

[1] Orchard, op. cit., p. 261.

[2] Morland, op. cit., p. 38.

[3] Ibid., pp. 173-174.

[4] Ray, op. cit., pp. 334-335.

[5] William Jones, *The History of the Christian Church*, Gallatin, Tennessee, Church History Research and Archives, 1983, vol. 2, p. 9.

[6] Ibid., pp. 22-23.

[7] Morland, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

[8] Robinson, op. cit., p. 517.

[9] J.A. Wylie, *History of the Waldenses*, Gallatin, Tennessee, Church History Research and Archives, 1985, p. 12.

[10] Roland Bainton, *Christendom*, New York, Harper and Row, 1964, vol. 1, p. 214.

[11] Tierney, op. cit., p. 222.

[12] Newman, op. cit., p. 580.

[13] Morland, op. cit., p. 65.

[14] Marie Gentert King, *Foxe's Book of Martyrs*, Old Tappan, New Jersey, Fleming H. Revell, 1968, p. 114.

[15] Morland, op. cit., p. 354.

[16] King, op. cit., p. 125.

[17] Jones, op. cit., pp. 452-453.

[18] Ibid., p. 37.

[19] Morland, op. cit., p. 40.

[20] Ibid., p. 34.

[21] Ibid., pp. 164, 166.

[22] Ronald Finucane, "The Waldensians," article in *Eerdman's Handbook to the History of Christianity*, Tim Dowley, editor, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1977, p. 316.

[23] Armitage, op. cit., p. 308.

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CHAPTER FOUR

WALDENSIAN VIEWS ON SOTERIOLOGY

In earlier chapters we have established that the Waldenses baptized by immersion, and that they did not practice infant baptism. We may be persuaded of these facts, and yet this would not be sufficient to establish that the Waldenses were Baptists. In our century the Churches of Christ and Christian Churches baptize by immersion and do not baptize infants, and yet they cannot be accepted as Baptists, because they insist on a form of baptismal regeneration, teaching that a person is not saved until he or she has been baptized. Before we can claim the Waldenses as Baptists, we must be assured that they rejected baptismal regeneration, and that they did not allow for any form of salvation by works, which was emphasized so heavily by the dominant Roman Catholic Church.

Fortunately, an ancient confession of the Waldenses, dated about 1120 A.D. by Morland, contains an unequivocal rejection of the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, which clearly distinguishes them from both Catholics and Campbellites on that point:

We do believe that the Sacraments are signs of the holy thing, or visible forms of the invisible grace, accounting it good that the faithful sometimes use the said signs or visible forms, if it may be done. However, we believe and hold,

that the abovesaid faithful may be saved without receiving the signs aforesaid, in case they have no place nor any means to use them. [1]

Ancient Waldensian literature abounds with evidence that the Waldenses had a sound doctrine of soteriology or salvation, insisting on justification by faith alone, hundreds of years before Luther. For instance, the author of the 12th-Century treatise "On the Purgatory Dream" makes these statements:

But St. Peter shows, Acts 15, that the hearts are purged by faith, and that faith is sufficient to cleanse evil, without any other outward means. . . . Where the apostle shows, that Christ so loved His Church, that He would not cleanse it by any other washing, but by His own blood. [2]

The 1655 Confession of the Reformed Churches of Piedmont contains this ringing affirmation of justification by faith:

16. That the Lord having fully and absolutely reconciled us unto God, through the Blood of His Cross, by virtue of His merit only, and not of our works, we are thereby absolved and justified in His sight, neither is there any other Purgatory besides His Blood, which cleanses us from all sin. . . .

18. That that faith is the gracious and efficacious work of the Holy Spirit which enlightens our souls, and persuades them to lean and rest upon the mercy of God, and so thereby to apply unto themselves the merits of Jesus Christ. [3]

While modern-day evangelicals attempt to sidle away from the doctrine of salvation by Christ's blood, it is clear that the Waldenses affirmed that scriptural doctrine, in the 12th Century and in the 17th.

Numerous historians have paid tribute to the testimony of the Waldenses for the doctrine of justification by faith alone. D'Aubigne says:

From their mountain heights the Waldenses protested during a long series of ages against the superstitions of Rome. "They contend for the lively hope which they have in God through Christ - for the regeneration and interior revival by faith, hope and charity - for the merits of Jesus Christ, and the all-sufficiency of His grace and righteousness." [4]

Tierney and Painter say:

They declared that Christ had taught the way of life that led to salvation and that His teachings could be read in the New Testament. . . . The Church and its sacraments were completely useless. [5]

Edman says:

As to their doctrinal views there is little dispute: they held to . . . justification by faith, and a life of good works together with stout denial of the value of priestly absolution or intercession of saints and angels, or the existence of purgatory, or the authority of the Roman Church. [6]

Broadbent says:

In Strassburg in 1212 the Dominicans had already arrested 500 persons who belonged to churches of the Waldenses. . . . Their leader and elder, named John, declared as he was about to die, "We are all sinners, but it is not our faith that makes us so, nor are we guilty of the blasphemy of which we are accused without reason; but we expect the forgiveness of our sins, and that without the help of men, and not through the merit of our own works. . . ." They did not admit the claim of the great professing Church to open or close the way of salvation, nor did they believe that salvation was through any sacraments or by anything but faith in Christ, which showed itself in the activities of love. [7]

Monastier relates this account of how the Waldenses, under the name of Ultramontanes or dwellers beyond the mountains, were condemned by a Catholic monk:

Gilles relates that a barbe of his name having gone into a church at Florence, heard a monk who was preaching exclaim "O Florence! What does Florence mean? The flower of Italy. And so thou was until these Ultramontanes persuaded thee that man is justified by faith and not by works; and herein they lie." [8]

We may rest assured that the Waldenses were not falsely accused by their enemies of teaching justification by faith, and that they held to the modern Baptist position on that subject.

[1] Morland, op. cit., p. 34.

[2] Ibid., pp. 162-163.

[3] Ibid., p. 65.

[4] J.H. Merle D'Aubigne, *History of the Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1987, p. 30.

[5] Brian Tierney and Sidney Painter, *Western Europe in the Middle Ages 300-1475*, New York, Alfred Knopf, 1970, p. 291.

[6] V. Raymond Edman, *The Light in Dark Ages*, Wheaton, Illinois, Van Kampen Press, 1949, p. 301.

[7] Broadbent, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

[8] Monastier, op. cit., p. 116.

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CHAPTER FIVE

WALDENSIAN VIEWS ON THE TRINITY

The question of whether the Waldenses held orthodox views on the subject of the Trinity and the deity of Christ is worthy of examination. After all, the study of dissenting sects in the Middle Ages yields many disturbing hints of belief in Adoptionism, the notion that Christ was a mere man who was endowed with Divine attributes at His baptism by God the Father. Through the centuries there have been churches with a Baptist name and testimony which yet have held Arian and Socinian views; such churches are prominent in the church history of Poland and Transylvania in the late 16th Century, and of England in the 18th Century.

One early and prominent figure in the ecclesiastical history of northern Italy, who is supposed to have given great inspiration to the Waldenses, was Claudius, who served as Bishop of Turin until about 839. Many church historians have claimed him as an evangelical and have denied that he was an Arian, but there is good reason to doubt the orthodoxy of this early reformer. Of Claudius, Orchard says:

Claude of Turin . . . was a Spaniard by birth, and a disciple of Felix, of Urgel, the Arian, who, in 794, published a work on the adoption of Jesus by the Father. . . . Claude lived and died a Catholic, and most probably an Arian. . . . His association with the Bishop of Urgel leaves his orthodoxy doubtful. [1]

It may not be possible to determine with certainty all of the religious views of this shadowy figure, but it is beyond doubt that the early Waldenses must have been exposed to Arian influences, which were numerous in the early Middle Ages. We are justified in stopping to ask whether the Waldenses preserved their orthodoxy, untainted by the Arian and Adoptionist heresies, through the misty gloom of the Dark Ages. The 18th-Century English historian Robinson claimed that most of the ancient Waldenses were Arians:

In regard to the great leading point, the most were Unitarians, but many held the same opinions as the church of Rome did, and consequently the doctrine of the Trinity. [2]

Of the later Bohemian Waldenses he says:

They were all indiscriminately called Waldenses and Picards, and they all rebaptized: but they were of very different sentiments; some held the divinity of Christ, others denied it. [3]

If Robinson, a Baptist of militant Unitarian views, was willing to admit that some of the Waldenses were Trinitarians, we can be sure that some of them were. Morland, who denies that Claudius of Turin was an Arian, also defends the Waldenses against that charge:

And this is all likewise that Rainerius Saccon has to object against the Waldenses, who succeeded this Archbishop and his disciples, for saith he, "All other sects render themselves horrible, by reason of their blasphemies against God Himself, but on the contrary, this hath great appearance of piety, forasmuch as they live justly in the sight of men; they believe well, as concerning God, in all things, and hold all the articles of the Creed; there is only one thing against them, that is, they hate and blaspheme the Church of Rome." [4]

Morland goes on to explain why the Waldenses were calumniated as Arians:

And because they denied the Host which the priest holds up at mass, to be God, they were called Arians, as those who denied the divinity of the eternal Son of God. [5]

The ancient confessions published by Morland contain no hint of Arianism or Adoptionism, but repeatedly affirm orthodox belief in the Trinity. A confession dating from 1120 contains these articles:

Article 1: We believe and firmly hold all that which is contained in the twelve articles of the symbol, which is called the Apostles Creed, accounting for heresy whatsoever is disagreeing, and not consonant to the said 12 Articles.

Article 2: We do believe that there is one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. [6]

Another confession makes this affirmation:

Article 2: We believe that Jesus Christ is the Son and image of the Father. That in Him dwells all the fulness of the Godhead, by whom we have knowledge of the Father. . . .

Article 3: We believe that the Holy Spirit is our Comforter, proceeding from the Father and the Son. [7]

An ancient catechism contains this dialogue concerning the Trinity:

Minister: Dost thou believe in the Holy Spirit?

Answer: Yes, I do believe. For the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father and the Son, and is one Person of the Trinity, and according to the Divinity, is equal to the Father and the Son.

Minister: Thou believest God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, thou hast therefore three Gods.

Answer: I have not three.

Minister: Yea, but thou hast named three.

Answer: That is by reason of the difference of the Persons, not by reason of the essence of the Divinity. For, although there are three Persons, yet notwithstanding there is but one essence. [8]

The Nobla Leycon, dated from the 12th Century, contains this passage:

Wherefore every one that will do good works, the honor of God the Father ought to be his first moving principle. He ought likewise to implore the aid of His glorious Son, the dear Son of the Virgin Mary, and the Holy Ghost which

lightens us in the true way. These three (the Holy Trinity) as being but one God, ought to be called upon. [9]

This would be a good time to examine the question of when the Nobla Leycon was written. Many historians have dismissed the claim that the Nobla Leycon was written in the early 12th Century, saying that it must have been composed at a later date. However, the Nobla Leycon dates itself from the 12th Century, opening with these words:

O brethren, give ear to a noble lesson, we ought always to watch and pray, for we see the world nigh to a conclusion. We ought to strive to do good works, seeing that the end of this world approacheth. There are already a thousand and one hundred years fully accomplished, since it was written thus, "For we are in the last time." [10]

Monastier argues persuasively in favor of the 12th-Century date for the Nobla Leycon, saying:

This circumstance, that five or six Vaudois manuscripts only have dates, is particularly favorable to their authenticity. If they had been affixed after the appearance of the writings, and without foundation, we do not see why the author of such a fraud should not have made use of it in reference to a greater number, or even to all.

We moreover appeal to the testimony of Raynouard, in favor of the correctness of these dates. It is known that this modern writer has applied himself specially to the study of the Romance language, of which the Vaudois is a particular dialect,. . .

He goes on to say, "The poem of the 'Nobla Leyczon' bears the date of the year 1100. The sect of the Vaudois is, then, much more ancient than has been generally believed." And a little after; "The date of the year 1100, which we find given in this poem, merits all confidence. Persons who read it with attention will perceive that the manuscript has not been interpolated, etc. Lastly, the very style of the work, the form of the versification, the agreement of the two manuscripts, (that of Cambridge and that of Geneva,) and the kind of various readings they present, all unite in favor of the authenticity of this poetical composition. . . ."

Thus we see that this distinguished writer, without prejudice or any interested motive, and having only in view the Romance language, after a long and profound study of the ancient religious documents of the Vaudois, pronounces

them authentic, and confirms the correctness of their dates. Such a decision appears to us to be of very great weight. [11]

Some of the other ancient manuscripts of the Waldenses, such as the catechism we have just quoted from, contain references to chapter divisions in the Bible, which were not introduced until the mid-13th Century, and occasionally even verse divisions, not introduced until the mid-16th Century. However, this circumstance does not in any way prove that those manuscripts were not originally composed in the 12th Century. Monastier explains the references to chapters as interpolations by later copyists:

We may readily understand, that, for the instruction of their readers, the copyists who without doubt, were the barbes, or Vaudois pastors, availing themselves of their acquaintance with this useful division, added the notation of the chapters and verses, without thereby subjecting the text to any falsification or deterioration. We have a stronger warrant for admitting this explanation, because all the quotations are not accompanied with the notation of chapters and verses, which would probably have been the case, had this useful addition been made by the author himself. [12]

Thus we have every reason for confidence in believing that many of the source materials for Waldensian faith and practice were written in the 12th Century, and thus are an accurate reflection of the doctrines of the Waldenses at that early epoch. If those documents are allowed to speak for themselves, they show that the Waldenses were Trinitarians, and reveal no trace of Arian or Adoptionist sentiment. Even if we admit the possibility that some of the Waldenses at some periods were Arian in belief, this would in no way detract from the conclusion that a true church was preserved through the Middle Ages by Waldenses who worshipped the Triune God and recognized the full deity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

[1] Orchard, op. cit., pp. 262-263.

[2] Robinson, op. cit., p. 316.

[3] Ibid., p. 517.

[4] Morland, op. cit., p. 11.

[5] Ibid., p. 13.

[6] Ibid., p. 30.

[7] Ibid., p. 37.

[8] Ibid., p. 77-78.

[9] Ibid., p. 100.

[10] Ibid., p. 99.

[11] Monastier, op. cit., pp. 79-81.

[12] Ibid., p. 83.

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CHAPTER SIX

WALDENSIAN VIEWS ON CALVINISM

The question of whether or not the Waldenses were Calvinistic in their beliefs, in the sense of adherence to the so-called Five Points of Calvinism (total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, perseverance of the saints) is one that is of great interest to Baptists today, many of whom identify themselves strongly as either Calvinistic Baptists, or as Free Will or General Baptists, while there are also other Baptists who prefer not to take sides in this controversy. This division in opinion among Baptists goes back at least as far as the 17th Century, when English Baptists were divided into two groups, the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists. It would be of great historical interest if we could find traces of Calvinistic theology prior to the time of Calvin and the Reformation, indicating that the Waldenses held to such convictions.

There can be no question that the Waldenses were Calvinists from the time of their earliest contacts with the great theologians of the Protestant Reformation. The 1532 confession of faith at Angrogne, which resulted from those contacts, contains these clear statements of belief:

2. All those that have been, and shall be saved, have been elected of God, before the foundation of the world. 3. It is impossible that those that are

appointed to salvation, should not be saved. 4. Whosoever upholds free-will denieth absolutely predestination, and the grace of God. [1]

The 1655 confession contains these articles:

25. That that Church is the company of the faithful, who having been elected before the foundation of the world, and called with an holy calling, come to unite themselves to follow the Word of God, believing whatsoever He teaches them, and living in His fear.

26. That that Church cannot err, nor be annihilated, but must endure forever, and that all the elect are upheld and preserved by the power of God in such sort, that they all persevere in the faith unto the end, and remain united in the holy Church, as so many living members thereof. [2]

The question that needs to be answered is this: Was the Calvinist faith that the Waldenses held to in 1532 something new, imparted to them by the Reformers, or was it a reflection of their convictions on that subject throughout the Middle Ages? It is difficult to answer this question with any degree of certainty. The early confessions of the Waldenses are lacking in such clear expositions of Calvinist sentiment as are found in the Reformation-era confessions. However, the Nobla Leycon does contain some references to the elect, closing with these words:

May it please the Lord which formed the world, that we may be of the number of His elect, to dwell in His court forever. [3]

Also, the catechism presented by Morland and dated by him as being "written in their own language several hundreds of years before either Calvin or Luther" [4] contains this statement which appears to teach Calvinism before Calvin:

By the Holy Catholic Church is meant all the elect of God, from the beginning of the world to the end, by the grace of God through the merit of Christ, gathered together by the Holy Spirit, and fore-ordained to eternal life; the number and names of whom are known to Him alone who has elected them; and in this Church remains none who is reprobate. [5]

The historian Jones cites these authorities who believed that the Waldenses were Calvinists:

Lindanus, a Catholic bishop of the see of Ghent, who wrote in defence of the tenets of the Church of Rome, about 1550, terms Calvin "the inheritor of the doctrine of the Waldenses."

Mezeray, the celebrated historiographer of France, in his Abridgement of Chronology, speaking of the Waldenses, says, "They held nearly the same opinions as those who are now called Calvinists."

Gualtier, a Jesuitical monk, in his chronological tables, drew up a catalogue consisting of seven and twenty particulars, in which he shows that the principles of the Waldenses, and those of the Calvinists coincided with each other. . . .

Aeneas Sylvius (afterwards Pope Pius II) declares the doctrine taught by Calvin to be the same as that of the Waldenses. . . . [6]

Orchard also cites the historian Mezeray:

"However various their names, they may be," says Mezeray, "reduced to two, that is, the Albigenses (a term now about introduced), and the Vaudois, and these two held almost the same opinions as those we call Calvinists." [7]

These references are too vague to give us any definite information as to whether the pre-Reformation Waldenses held to the same strict interpretations of the sovereignty of God as are found in the Reformation-era confessions of the Waldenses. It is quite possible to appear to agree with many of the religious beliefs of the Calvinists, especially from the standpoint of a Roman Catholic writer, without agreeing with the Calvinists on all points, including the five points of Calvinism.

Jarrell goes into a little more detail on just what the Waldenses believed, saying:

From the foregoing they agreed with Baptists on depravity. The new creation inevitably implies "total depravity;" otherwise no need of the mighty power of the Spirit and the new creation in saving a soul. . . .

The Waldenses were Baptists as to the doctrine of election. Prof. A.A. Hodge, D.D., of Princeton Theological Seminary, says: . . . "The Lollards, another name for the Waldenses, the followers of Wickliffe, in the fourteenth century, were all of the general school of St. Augustine." [8]

But in Jarrell's statements on depravity, he appears to be speaking of the 16th-Century Waldenses. As for the statement by Hodge, an ardent Calvinist, it is too vague. It is possible to be "of the general school of St. Augustine" without agreeing with Augustine on all points, including predestination.

In general, the historians who claim that the pre-Reformation Waldenses were Calvinists before Calvin are Calvinists themselves, who may tend to assume more with regard to Waldensian convictions on that subject than they can document specifically, or they are Roman Catholics who perhaps failed to discern the different shades of belief among the Protestant and dissenting sects. For every historian who claims the pre-Reformation Waldenses as Calvinists, another historian can be found to say that they were not. Robinson says:

No writer hath chastised them (the Calvinists) more severely or more justly for claiming apostolical succession throughout the Vaudois than bishop Bossuet. Said he: . . . they never heard of predestination and justification till the Calvinists preached to them. [9]

Monastier, himself a Waldensian pastor, has this to say about Waldensian doctrine in 1530, just before the confession of Angrogne was issued:

It would appear that in what regards the acceptance of salvation and the internal life of the Christian, the barbes at that time allowed an immense share to the human will. . . . They did not admit predestination, excepting with certain explanations, which reduced it to be nothing more than an anticipated view of human intentions and actions by the omniscience of God. [10]

The Angrogne confession was a direct result of the contact that the Waldenses had with the Reformers in the year 1530. The story is in many ways a thrilling one; the beleaguered, dispirited Waldenses of Savoy, fearing themselves to be the only true Christians left in the world and facing the possibility of total extermination at the hands of their Catholic enemies, suddenly began to hear accounts of a great religious movement sweeping the lands to the north of them, in which men and women were rejecting Catholic falsehoods and turning back to the truths of the Bible as the Waldenses understood them. Two representatives were sent from Piedmont to Basel to meet with the Lutheran Reformer Oecolampadius, who was astonished and pleased to learn of the existence of the faithful Waldenses who had preserved the evangelical faith from the time of the apostles, and he gave them much advice and godly counsel. As a result of this contact, a great synod of Waldensian barbes, or pastors, was held at Angrogne in 1532, at which the

great reformer Guillaume Farel was present, as well as George Morel, a barbe who had met with Oecolampadius.

Fox says, that Morel "declared to his brethren all the points of his commission; and opened unto them, how many and great errors they were in, into which their old ministers, whom they called barbes, that is to say, uncles, had brought them, leading them from the right way of the true religion." Thus it is evident that Morel had learned something new of the Reformers, differing from the doctrine of the Waldensian fathers, and which he proposed to introduce into the creed of the brethren in his region.

And so Dr. Murdock, the translator of Mosheim, in a note upon that author, represents the case. He says: "In their council in Angrogne, A.D. 1532, they adopted a short confession of faith, professedly embracing the doctrine they had firmly believed for four hundred years, yet manifestly a departure in some particulars from the principles stated by their deputies to Ecolampadius, and conformed to the new views he had communicated to them, especially in relation to free-will, grace, predestination, and several points of practical religion." [11]

Broadbent concurs that the Waldenses, under the influence of their newfound Reformer brethren, made a major shift toward Calvinist doctrine at the synod of Angrogne in 1532:

Many matters of practice were considered, but the question which excited the greatest discussion was one of doctrine. Farel taught that "God has elected before the foundation of the world all those who have been or will be saved. It is impossible for those who have been ordained to salvation not to be saved. Whosoever upholds free-will, absolutely denies the grace of God." Jean of Molines and Daniel of Valence laid stress both on the capacity of man and also his responsibility to receive the grace of God. In this they were supported by the nobles present and by many others, who urged that the changes advocated were not necessary and also that they would imply a condemnation of those who had so long and faithfully guided these churches. Farel's eloquence and sympathetic earnestness strongly commended his arguments to his hearers and the majority accepted his teaching. A confession of faith was drawn up in accordance with this, which was signed by most present, though declined by some. [12]

How may these conflicting statements of the various historians be reconciled? Some say that the Waldenses first became Calvinists in 1532 as a result of their contacts with the Reformers, and others affirm that they were Calvinists

prior to that time. We must take into account the possible influence on the historians of their own biases. Those who are Calvinists will tend to conclude easily that the pre-Reformation Waldenses were Calvinists. As for Robinson, who says they were not Calvinists, his anti-Calvinist bias is evident; he held a grudge against John Calvin for plotting the execution of Michael Servetus, who, like Robinson, was a Socinian. Another possibility is that different Waldenses in different times and places held divergent views on the questions of predestination and free-will. The Waldenses of Savoy just prior to 1532 clearly did not hold to Calvinist positions on these issues, but that does not mean that all Waldenses in all times believed just as those of Savoy. The existing medieval Waldensian literature contains some strong references to a belief in the doctrine of election, and this should not surprise us; they could have easily derived such sentiments from Augustine, or from the Bible itself.

[1] Morland, op. cit., p. 40.

[2] Ibid., p. 67.

[3] Ibid., p. 120.

[4] Ibid., p. 72.

[5] Ibid., p. 79.

[6] Jones, op. cit., pp. 90-91.

[7] Orchard, op. cit., p. 192.

[8] Jarrel, op. cit., pp. 165-166.

[9] Robinson, op. cit., p. 476.

[10] Monastier, op. cit., p. 137.

[11] Waller, op. cit., pp. 14-15.

[12] Broadbent, op. cit., pp. 219-220.

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CHAPTER SEVEN

WALDENSIAN VIEWS ON SEPARATION

It is easy to declare that the medieval Waldenses were Baptists, but just how much does this tell us? There are many Baptist churches and denominations that independent Baptists will have no affiliation or ecclesiastical fellowship with, because they are ecumenical, and are included in the membership of the World Council of Churches and National Council of Churches. In the United States today, the American Baptist Churches USA, National Baptist Convention of America, National Baptist Convention USA, and the Progressive National Baptist Convention are all listed as member denominations of the World Council of Churches as of June, 1988, an affiliation which detracts sadly from the Baptist testimony of these churches. More to the point, the same list of WCC member churches includes the 22,000-member Chiesa Evangelica Valdese, [1] the 20th-Century remnant of the Waldenses in Italy.

The Waldenses of today are clearly ecumenical in spirit. It is admitted that they are no longer Baptists. Their doctrinal orthodoxy began to wane in the late 18th Century, which Monastier complained of:

The end of the eighteenth century was marked in the valleys by a decline in the tone of religion, which was weakened everywhere. There, as in other countries, it might be remarked that the Christian spirit, so vigorous and so fruitful in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, fed itself less abundantly from the pure source of the gospel. A proud rationalism, mere human opinion, began to claim a place in theology, and, attempting to make religion more accessible and less repulsive in its doctrines, tarnished and disfigured it. The candidates for the sacred ministry acquired for the most part in the foreign academies, where they prepared for entering upon it, nothing but a cold orthodoxy, or the germs of Socinian laxity. The first years of the nineteenth century brought no amelioration. Virtue was often preached and exalted more than the work of Christ, or than faith, or than the love of the Lord. The title of philosopher was placed at least on a level with that of Christian. The Vaudois representative of this tendency was M. Mondon, the late pastor of San Giovanni, a man of talent, well versed in classical literature and profane history, of a singular, capricious character, but courageous and full of frankness. His belief was attacked, and on good grounds, for it was far from being evangelical. . . . [2]

Thus we see that the Waldensian movement in recent centuries has suffered from the weakening influences of rationalism and ecumenism, which both are elements which modern independent Baptists would completely fail to identify with. Yet there is abundant evidence that the medieval Waldenses were of a far different spirit, not only thoroughly evangelical, but also partaking of the same bold separationist position as is taken by independent Baptists today. From the beginning the Waldenses were separationists, withdrawing from the Roman Catholic Church, both physically and ecclesiastically, taking refuge in the remote valleys of the Alps. Many historians believe that the Waldenses are the direct spiritual descendants of the Novatians, who separated from the Church of Rome in 251 A.D. and maintained that separated stance in the face of persecution, fleeing to the Alps rather than compromise their convictions. Says Ray:

The Novatians were persecuted by Constantine, the first to unite church and state; and numbers of these persecuted Novatians left Italy for the valleys of Piedmont at different times from about the year 325 to 425; and these wandering Novatians were in after years called Waldenses. It then appears that the Waldenses sprang from the Novatians who fled from Italy in the fourth century. [3]

Orchard agrees, and states that the withdrawal of the Novatians to the mountains was hastened by the passage of an imperial edict against rebaptizing in 413:

The edict was probably obtained by the influence of Augustine, who could endure no rival, nor would he bear with any who questioned the virtue of his rites, or the sanctity of his brethren, or the soundness of the Catholic creed; and these points being disputed by the Novationists and Donatists, two powerful and extensive bodies of dissidents in Italy and Africa, they were consequently made to feel the weight of his influence. These combined modes of oppression led the faithful to abandon the cities, and seek retreats in the country, which they did, particularly in the valleys of Piedmont, the inhabitants of which began to be called Waldenses. [4]

Morland describes the separationism of the early Waldenses in these terms:

But when the Church of Rome began to corrupt itself, and would by no means be persuaded to retain the purity of that apostolical doctrine and divine worship, then those of the valleys began to separate themselves from them, and to "come out from amongst them, that so they might not be partakers of their sins, nor receive of their plagues." [5]

The ancient documents preserved by Morland show that the medieval Waldenses retained in full the uncompromising separationist spirit which characterized the Novatian movement from the beginning. The ancient catechism of the Waldenses quotes Matthew 16:6; Psalm 26:5; Numbers 16:26; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; 2 Thessalonians 3:6; and Revelation 18:4 in defense of the position of separation, and then includes this question and answer:

Minister: By what marks are those people known who are not in truth with the Church?

Answer: By public sins, and an erroneous faith. For, we ought to fly from such persons, lest we be defiled by them. [6]

The author of the 12th-Century treatise on Antichrist defends at great length the doctrine of ecclesiastical separation, quoting from Matthew 10:35-37; Matthew 7:15; Matthew 16:6; Matthew 24:4-5, 23; Revelation 18:4; 2 Corinthians 6:14-18; Ephesians 5:7-8; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-7; Ephesians 5:11; and 2 Timothy 3:1-5, and then makes this appeal:

By what has been said hitherto it appears clearly, what is the wickedness of Antichrist, and his perverseness. Also our Lord commands our separating from him, and joining ourselves with the holy city of Jerusalem: therefore knowing such things, the Lord having revealed them unto us by His servants, and believing this revelation according to the holy Scriptures, and being admonished by the commandments of the Lord, we do both inwardly and outwardly depart from Antichrist. . . . Now then the causes of our separation are these ensuing. Be it known unto every one in general and in particular, that the cause of our separation is this, namely, for the real truth's sake of the faith, and by reason of our inward knowledge of the only true God, and the unity of the divine essence in three Persons. . . . [7]

In previous chapters we have seen how vigorously the Waldenses rejected the traditions and sacraments of the Catholics, especially their masses. It is clear that they did not accept the claim of the Roman Catholic Church to be a Christian communion. Nevins says:

As to their doctrine and practice, they held the Catholic community not to be a church of Christ. They therefore rebaptized such as had been baptized in that community. For this reason they were called Anabaptists. [8]

As we keep these facts in mind, and consider the words of ancient Waldensian writers on separation, sounding much like 20th-Century independent Baptist preachers, and quoting the same verses that have often been quoted by independent Baptists in defense of separation, then it is obvious that the Waldenses were originally separationists in the same mold as modern-day independent Baptists. Says Ray:

The Waldenses regarded all the Catholic worship as the grossest idolatry; they did not, therefore, commune with Antichrist. They boldly affirmed that the Church of Rome is the "whore of Babylon," and any communion with her they regarded as spiritual fornication - an unspeakable abomination. [9]

Pickering agrees that the Waldenses were once separatists, even if they are no longer:

The small remnant of Waldensians remaining in Italy are ecumenical and not of the same spirit as their ancient counterparts. Most certainly the great majority of Waldensians were separatists. [10]

It may be objected that we cannot claim the Waldenses as separationists since they often attended the masses and other ordinances of the Roman Catholic Church, as we have seen that they sometimes did, to avoid persecution. The answer is that this kind of compromising conduct was not characteristic of all Waldenses in all times and places, but was an error that certain Waldenses, especially those of Savoy just prior to the Reformation, fell into, against their better judgment, under the weight of the greatest pressure and persecution. Mosheim tells us that the Waldenses of France were of a far more stalwart and separationist spirit than those of Savoy:

It is, however, to be observed, that the Waldenses were not without their intestine divisions. Such as resided in Italy differed considerably in their opinions from those who dwelt in France and the other European countries. . . . The latter affirmed on the contrary, that the Church of Rome had apostatized from Christ, was deprived of the Holy Spirit, and was in reality, the whore of Babylon mentioned in the Revelation of St. John. [11]

D'Aubigne tells us more of the spirit of the French Waldenses in 1484, who shortly afterwards paid a great price in persecution for their separationist stance:

There was at that time on all the slopes of the Dauphinese Alps, and along the banks of the Durance, a new growth of the old Waldensian opinions. . . . Bold

men called the Roman Church the church of devils, and maintained that it was as profitable to pray in a stable as in a church. [12]

Concerning the compromising Waldenses of Savoy, it is recorded that as a direct result of their contacts with Oecolampadius and other Reformation leaders in 1530, who urged them to forsake all fellowship with the Church of Rome, the Waldenses quickly returned to a separationist position. Wylie says:

The ancient spirit of the Waldenses revived. They no longer practiced those dissimulations and cowardly concealments to which they had had recourse to avoid persecution. They no longer feared to confess their faith. Henceforward they were never seen at mass, or in the Popish churches. They refused to recognize the priests of Rome as ministers of Christ, and under no circumstance would they receive any spiritual benefit or service at their hands. [13]

The conclusion is clear; the Waldenses were separationists, in an age when to be a separationist was punishable by being burned to death or otherwise hideously tortured, often over a period of days, before the sufferer was released by death. Their consistency as separationists was not perfect, but Baptists of 20th-Century America, who have never had to face the persecution which the Waldenses faced, should not be quick to judge them. Rather, we should take courage from their valiant spirit, and follow their example of complete separation from the Roman Catholic Church.

Unlike the Waldenses, we are privileged to live in an age in which separation costs us almost nothing, and yet many Baptists are letting down their walls of separation, rushing to recognize the Church of Rome as a Christian communion and seeking ecumenical fellowship with it. David Beale has cited these examples: a Roman Catholic priest filling the pulpit of the First Baptist Church of Tallahassee, Florida in 1966; a Baptist-Catholic dialogue at Wake Forest College in 1969, which declared that "we are brothers in Christ"; an ecumenical gathering, including Roman Catholics, at the First Baptist Church of Oklahoma City, Oklahoma in 1970; a Roman Catholic priest leading a revival meeting at the Vestavia Hills Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama in 1970; a Roman Catholic priest serving as a chaplain at Furman University (Baptist) in Greenville, South Carolina in 1970; and the visit by Dr. W.A. Criswell and 400 members of his First Baptist Church of Dallas, Texas to Rome in 1971, at which time they participated in a papal audience with Pope Paul VI. [14]

Instead of asking whether the Waldenses were separationists in the mold of modern Baptists, perhaps we should ask if modern Baptists have one-tenth of the courage and separationist conviction that the Waldenses had. By our friendly ecumenical cooperation with the Roman Catholic Church, we betray the blood of the Waldensian martyrs who died rather than compromise with the Church of Rome in any way. We need to remind ourselves of the noble example of the Waldenses, and emulate that example.

In connection with the subject of separation, it should be noted that the Waldenses not only observed ecclesiastical separation, but also held to some of the same standards of personal separation as those observed by independent Baptists today. Monastier says:

The frequenting of taverns, "those fountains of sin and schools of the devil, where he works miracles of his own kind," were prohibited, as well as dancing. [15]

The Waldenses took a stern stand against dancing, proclaiming that:

A ball is the devil's procession, and whosoever entereth in there, entereth into his procession. The devil is the leader, the middle, and the end of the dance. So many paces as a man maketh in a ball, so many leaps he maketh toward hell. [16]

It is commonly thought that the strict standards of personal and ecclesiastical separation championed by 20th-Century fundamentalists are something new, originated by them. But actually they are only following in a long and honorable tradition of separationism of which the Waldenses were a part. The Waldenses were not legalists; that is, they did not believe that the keeping of rules was essential for salvation; but they did believe in standards for godly living, consistent with the principles of Christian liberty. One recent author, Virgil Bopp, has said:

These Waldenses cherished the distinct doctrine and practice of Christian liberty and generally agreed with what have come to be called the Baptist Distinctives. They might well have been called the Baptists of an early day. [17]

[1] *Christian Beacon*, September 1, 1988, p. 6.

[2] Monastier, op. cit., p. 374.

[3] Ray, op. cit., p. 179.

[4] Orchard, op. cit., p. 61.

[5] Morland, op. cit., p. 9.

[6] Ibid., pp. 81-82.

[7] Ibid., pp. 153-155.

[8] William Manlius Nevins, *Alien Baptism and the Baptists*, Little Rock, Challenge Press, 1977, p. 82.

[9] Ray, op. cit., p. 335.

[10] Ernest Pickering, *Biblical Separation: The Struggle for a Pure Church*, Schaumburg, Illinois, Regular Baptist Press, 1979, p. 36.

[11] Quoted by J.M. Holliday, *The Baptist Heritage*, Texarkana, Bogard Press, 1974, pp. 39-40.

[12] D'Aubigne, op. cit., p. 433.

[13] Wylie, op. cit., p. 60.

[14] David O. Beale, *S.B.C.: House on the Sand?*, Greenville, South Carolina, Bob Jones University Press, 1985, pp. 140-142.

[15] Monastier, op. cit., p. 97.

[16] Morland, op. cit., p. 88.

[17] Virgil Bopp, *Confidently Committed: A Look at the Baptist Heritage*, Schaumburg, Illinois, Regular Baptist Press, 1987, p. 42.

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CHAPTER EIGHT

WALDENSIAN CHURCH GOVERNMENT AND STANDARDS FOR CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

There is much evidence to show that the churches of the Waldenses were organized on the same basis as independent Baptist churches today, with congregational rule, a ministry called by the congregations, and church membership composed of immersed believers only. When Erasmus came into contact with the remnants of the Waldenses in the early 16th Century, he found them to be practicing Baptist church polity:

A notable proof of the antiquity of the Baptists of Moravia is here recorded. Johanna Schlecta Costelacius wrote a letter from Bohemia, October 10, 1519, to Erasmus, affirming that for one hundred years the Picards had been dipping believers, and that they rebaptized and were therefore Anabaptists. His words are: "Such as come over to their sect must every one be dipped in mere water. . . ." These Picards, Waldenses, were spread all over the Flemish Netherlands, and in Germany. . . . Erasmus wrote of them, "The Husites renounce all rites and ceremonies of the Catholic Church; they ridicule our doctrine and practice in both sacraments; they deny orders and elect officers from among the laity; they receive no other rule than the Bible; they admit none into their communion until they are dipped in water, or baptized; and they reckon one another without distinction in rank to be called brothers and sisters." [1]

Historians appear to be in agreement that the Waldenses required baptism for membership. Overbey says:

They also believed that the ordinances were only baptism and the Lord's supper and they were only symbolic, that only believers should be baptized, that baptism was by immersion, and that salvation and baptism were the requirements for church membership. [2]

Jarrell says:

The Waldenses admitted the catechumeni after an exact instruction, a long fast in which the church united, to witness to them the concern they took in their conversion, and a confession of sins in token of contrition. The newly baptized were, the same day, admitted to the eucharist, with all the brethren and sisters present. Thus they, like Baptists, first instructed; second, baptized; third, being in the Church, admitted them to the supper. . . . [3]

Armitage says:

On one point more the Waldensians of the dispersion were one with the Antipedobaptists. They insisted on a regenerate Church membership marked by baptism upon their personal faith. . . . The Baptists of today and the original Waldensians have much in common. They sought the restoration of Apostolic Church life in a true Christian character and in a holy church membership; they followed the literal interpretation of Scripture; their priesthood was that of believers and not of a hierarchy; men renewed in heart and life. . . . [4]

Meanwhile, from an ancient confession of the Waldenses, we read these words, referring to

. . . the sacrament of Baptism, . . . by which also we are received into the Holy Congregation of the people of God, thus protesting and declaring openly our faith and amendment of life. [5]

Thus the Baptist policy of the Waldenses, in requiring baptism as a prerequisite for membership, appears to be well-documented. It is remarkable that the Waldenses maintained such a policy, in an age when rebaptizing was often punished by death. The steadfastness of the Waldenses in insisting on an immersed membership should be a lesson and encouragement to Baptists today. Baptist churches should continue that noble policy, and the free flow of members from Baptist churches to interdenominational churches that do not require baptism for membership should be discouraged. Such churches, with their easygoing membership standards (if they have membership rolls at all,) are not of like faith and practice with true Baptist churches, and thus Baptist churches should not agree to grant letters of good and regular standing to churches with "open membership." All born-again believers are part of the same family of God, but this does not mean that the interdenominational religious societies must be recognized as true churches in the New Testament sense of the term.

Another area of Christian practice where modern Baptists could learn a lesson from the Waldenses is that of church discipline. Monastier assures us that they did discipline unruly church members:

Firmness, prudence, and charity were observed in the administration of reproof. If the offender resisted brotherly exhortations, and his fault had been serious and public, should he refuse to amend, ecclesiastical penalties were inflicted on him. He might be deprived "of all assistance from the Church, of the ministry, of the fellowship of the Church, and of union with it." [6]

The administration of scriptural church discipline is a practice that has almost disappeared from most modern Baptist churches, with ruinous results. It is often in vain to expect the heathen outside the church to fall in line with God's will for them, when the church membership is stacked with those whose unruly lives show forth a bad testimony to the community.

Concerning the pastors of the Waldenses, the ancient discipline of the churches of Piedmont tells us how the Waldenses selected their pastors or ministers:

All those which are to be received as pastors among us, while they remain with their brethren they are to intreat our people to receive them into the ministry, as likewise that they would be pleased to pray to God for them, that they may be made worthy of so great a charge; and this they are to do, to give a proof or evidence of their humility. . . .

And afterwards having good testimonials, and being well approved of, they are received with imposition (or laying on) of hands and preaching. . . .

Our daily food, and that raiment wherewith we are covered, we have ministered and given to us freely and by way of alms, sufficient for us, by the good people whom we teach and instruct.

Among other privileges which God has given to His servants, He hath given them this, to choose their leaders and those who are to govern the people, and to constitute elders in their charges, according to the diversity of the work in the unity of Christ, which is clear by that saying of the Apostle in the epistle to Titus chapter 1, "For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee."

When any one of us the foresaid pastors falls into any gross sin, he is both excommunicated and prohibited to preach. [7]

From this important passage we gather that the Waldensian clergy were selected by the congregations they served, and that they received support from their congregations. The pastors as well as other church members were subject to church discipline, and pastors who fell into gross sin were deposed from the ministry. No excuses were made for receiving adulterous pastors back into the ministry on the basis of God's forgiveness or because those pastors were good fund-raisers. Our churches and gullible Christians today, who are so willing to receive adulterous preachers and covetous

"televangelists," allowing them to occupy pulpits although their lives are stained with sin, would do well to observe the example of the Waldenses in rejecting such false servants of the Lord. An ancient confession of the Waldenses contains this warning against irresponsible clergy:

We hold that the ministers of the church, as bishops and pastors, ought to be irreprehensible, as well in their life as doctrine. And that otherwise they ought to be deprived of their office, and others substituted in their places. As likewise, that none ought to presume to take upon him this honor, but he who is called by God as was Aaron, feeding the flock of God, not for the sake of dishonest gain, nor as having any lordship over the clergy, but as being sincerely an example to his flock, in word, in conversation, in charity, in faith, and in chastity. [8]

It is evident that Waldensian views concerning the ministry were in accord with the Baptist conviction concerning the priesthood of all believers, not the Roman Catholic view which exalted the priests high above the laity. Ray says:

The Waldenses had pastors ordained by themselves. It is so generally admitted that the ancient Waldenses recognized the equality of their membership, as regards church privileges, that it is unnecessary to occupy much space on this point. . . . It may be regarded as an established historic fact, that the ancient Waldenses possessed the Baptist peculiarity of religious equality in church membership. [9]

Concerning the question of who among the Waldenses could administer ordinances, Robinson quotes Bishop Bossuet as saying:

They all without distinction, if they were reputed good people, preached and administered ordinances. They made no provision for a clergy, but required all to work for their bread. They formed their churches of only good men. [10]

It may be questioned whether this Roman Catholic critic of the Waldenses had a perfect understanding of the nature of the Waldensian clergy. Since the Catholics believed that no man could administer ordinances without having received the Catholic sacrament of ordination, they tended to regard the Waldensian pastors as laymen, indistinguishable from the members of their congregations. A contrary view is presented by Jones, who emphasizes that the Waldenses had a distinct ministry, and that their laymen did not administer ordinances:

The Catholic writers frequently reproach them with making little or no account of the pastoral office - affirming that they made the duty of preaching the gospel common to every member of the church, both male and female; and that they allowed persons who had not the suffrages of the church, to administer the ordinances of gospel worship. That this was an unfounded accusation has been very satisfactorily shown by Dr. Allix, whose researches into the history of those churches entitle him to the gratitude of posterity. I subjoin the substance of his defence of them against this charge.

"1. Bernard, abbot of Foncaud, in his treatise against the sect of the Waldenses, ch. vi. accuses only some of them of having no pastors; which shows, as he very properly remarks, that the body of that church had a fixed ministry before the end of the twelfth century. . . .

"Reinerius Saccho, who lived about the year 1250, acknowledges that in Lombardy, where he himself resided, they had their bishops or pastors. . . . Again, Matthew Paris (under the year 1243) speaks of a bishop of the Paterines in Cremona, who was deposed by them for fornication. And, further, Pilickdorf, a writer quoted by Bossuet in his history of the Variations, p. 223, says, 'they do not approve of a layman's celebrating the eucharist,' ch. 1, which sufficiently proves, says Dr. Allix, that they made a signal difference between the people and their pastors." [11]

The evidence leans toward the conclusion that Waldensian views on the ministry were quite similar to those of Baptists today. But before we can embrace the Waldenses as Baptists in their church organization, we must examine what is perhaps the most important issue of all, the question of whether the congregations of the Waldenses were independent and under congregational rule, or were under the rule of bishops (the episcopal form of church government). Morland examines the claim that they had episcopal rule, and then dismisses it:

The monk Rainerius in a treatise of his, does indeed give a strange description of the office and customs of those barbes, namely, that they had a chief bishop among them, who had always two attending him, the one whereof he called his eldest, and the other his youngest son; and besides these two, he had also a third that followed him in the quality of a deacon; he adds likewise, that this bishop laid his hands on others, with a sovereign authority, and sent them about, hither and thither, as he pleased, and that in as imperious a manner as the Pope himself.

With these and the like fictitious notions or chimeras Rainerius would fain possess the minds of men, but all in vain, for, it is manifest by what has been already inserted in the fifth chapter of this book, that both the calling of those ministers, and the administration of their office, was quite of another nature and strain; there we shall see, that those who were to be received as pastors among them, were to intreat the people to receive them, and to pray to God for them. . . . [12]

Morland describes the synods of the Waldenses in these terms:

As to their synodical constitutions, the above-specified manuscripts tell us, that the barbes (or pastors) assembled once a year, to treat of their affairs in a general council. And the Italian manuscript (the original thereof is to be seen with the rest in the University library of Cambridge, bearing date 1587) tells us that this council was constantly held in the month of September, and that some hundreds of years ago, there were seen assembled together in one synod held at Valone del Lauso in Val Clusone, no less than 140 barbes. The same manuscript adds, that they had always their consistories, and a form of discipline among themselves, except it were in the time of persecution, and then the barbes had their consistories in secret, and did also preach to their congregations, during the winter season, in their own private houses, and in the summer time, upon the tops of mountains, as the people were there feeding their flocks. [13]

There is nothing stated here that would give any evidence of an episcopal hierarchy, or that would show that the local congregations were not independent. Many independent Baptist churches are affiliated with associations that meet once a year for mutual fellowship and consultation, a practice which is not regarded by them as infringing on the total autonomy of the local church. Jarrel's remarks on Waldensian church government are worthy of consideration:

In church government the Waldenses were essentially Baptists. Gieseler speaks of "their anti-hierarchal system." . . . Dr. Lord: "They have had a ministry of their own, consisting only of presbyters and deacons." . . . Says Robert Baird: "There is nothing in the organization or action of these churches that in the slightest degree savors of prelacy. And, in answer to our inquiries on this subject, the pastors have, without exception, stated that prelacy has never existed in these valleys; and that such has ever been the uniform opinion of their ancestors, so far as it has been handed down to them. As to their bishops, spoken of in some of their early writings, they believe that they were nothing more than pastors. . . ."

Of them Preger, than whom there is no higher authority, says that all "ecclesiastical authority was vested in the congregation, so that there was no room for bishops. . . ."

They had (as are the general secretaries or superintendents of missions among Baptists of today) general superintendents. But, as Dr. A.H. Newman observes: "The early Waldenses . . . refused to employ the word bishop to designate their general superintendents." Speaking of the Humiliati, Dr. Newman says: "Like the Waldenses, they ascribed to the local body of believers, or to the general assembly of the local bodies, the highest ecclesiastical powers." [14]

The Waldensian pastor Monastier states that there were no high-ranking prelates among his ancient forebears, and that all the pastors held equal rank:

No hierarchical distinction was established; the only difference that existed between the pastors was that arising from age, or services performed, and personal respect. [15]

Thus there is every reason to conclude that the Waldenses observed the principle of the autonomy of the local church, which is held to by independent Baptists today. They also believed in an ordained clergy, in a regenerated and baptized church membership, and in church discipline. Their assemblies were true New Testament churches, worthy to be described as Baptist. In fact, we might devoutly wish that all Baptist churches today might adhere as closely to the New Testament pattern as the Waldensian churches did.

[1] Christian, op. cit., pp. 93-94.

[2] Edward Overbey, *A Brief History of the Baptists*, Little Rock, Challenge Press, 1974, p. 46.

[3] Jarrel, op. cit., p. 168.

[4] Armitage, op. cit., pp. 304-305.

[5] Morland, op. cit., p. 38.

[6] Monastier, op. cit., pp. 96-97.

[7] Morland, op. cit., pp. 73-74.

[8] Ibid., p. 38.

[9] Ray, op. cit., pp. 332-333.

[10] Robinson, op. cit., p. 476.

[11] Jones, op. cit., pp. 67-68.

[12] Morland, op. cit., pp. 178-179.

[13] Ibid., p. 183.

[14] Jarrel, op. cit., pp. 177-180.

[15] Monastier, op. cit., p. 95.

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CHAPTER NINE

WERE THE WALDENSES MANICHAEANS?

The accusation of Manichaeism is one that the Catholics appear to have used universally to smear all dissenting and evangelical sects in the Middle Ages, including the Waldenses. The charge of Manichaeism made against the Waldenses cannot be easily dismissed as a baseless fabrication of the Romanists, since it was repeated by Robinson, who wrote:

The old Waldenses had no notion of uniformity, and many of them were Manicheans and Arians. . . . All these people were called Waldenses, and hence it came to pass, that some contended they were Manicheans, and Arians, and others that they were the direct opposite. Divide them into two classes, and both say the truth. The Jesuit Gretser, abating the Catholicism of his language, gives a just account of them, when he says, the Waldenses were collections of various sects of Manicheans, Arians, and others. . . . The orthodox positively affirm, "they were not guilty of manichaeism, and other abominable heresies." "Yes," replies the learned Limborch, than whom no man knew their history better, "they were, many of them Manichaeans: it is not fair," adds he, "to deny a fact, which is as clear as noon day." [1]

Robinson, in his voluminous researches on the Waldenses, fails to make it clear as day that the Waldenses were Manichaeans. In fact, he fails to present any evidence for that conclusion at all, except for the few quotations from the "experts" which we have already seen. Also, he admits that not all the Waldenses were Manichaeans. Even if it is conceded that some, or many, Waldenses in various times and places were Manichaeans, this would in no way detract from the true orthodoxy and Baptist nature of many other Waldensian assemblies throughout the Middle Ages.

However, an examination of the extant writings of the Waldenses yields no evidence or taint of Manichaeism, and provides strong reasons for believing that they rejected the tenets of Manichaeism and dualism. But before we go further, let us define what those heretical tenets were. Tierney and Painter define them in these terms:

The basic feature of Catharan doctrine was belief in a dual supreme deity - God and Satan, good and evil. God created and ruled the spiritual world, and Satan the material. This doctrine was essentially Manichean and non-Christian. As all material things were produced by Satan, the perfect life according to the teachings of the Cathari was extremely ascetic. Its devotees had to be absolutely celibate and could eat no animal food. [2]

Newman says:

Manichaeism is Oriental dualism under Christian names, the Christian names employed retaining scarcely a trace of their proper meaning. . . . The "elect" practised a Buddhist asceticism, possessing no property, abstaining from marriage, from wine, from animal food, were extremely careful not to destroy animal or vegetable life. . . . The Manichaeans rejected the Old Testament, and treated the New Testament in the most arbitrary way, rejecting whatever seemed unfavorable to their views, and maintaining that even the apostles did not fully understand Christ. [3]

Broadbent says:

Manichaeism assails alike the teaching of Scripture and the testimony of Nature that God is the Creator of all things. . . . Manichaeism, by attributing the visible and corporeal to the work of a dark and evil power and only that which is spiritual to the true God, struck at the roots of the Divine revelation, of which Creation, the Fall, and Redemption are essential and indivisible parts. [4]

Manichaeism was a warmed-over version of the old Gnosticism of Marcion which taught that the visible world was created by an evil Demiurge, not the true God. It is obvious that if the Waldenses were Manichaeans, then they were not Baptists, or in any sense orthodox Christian believers of any kind. However, we can easily clear them from the charge of Manichaeism by examining their statements of faith, to determine their beliefs on two key elements of Manichaeism: their views as to who created the world, and their views on marriage as opposed to celibacy.

If the Waldenses were Manichaeans, then they would have rejected the concept of God as creator, and they would have rejected those books of the Old Testament that described God as the Creator, especially the Pentateuch. But we find no trace of any such rejection of God as creator in the writings of the Waldenses. On the contrary, their confessions specifically confirm that doctrine which was so offensive to the Manichaeans. The confession of faith dated in 1120 by Morland contains these affirmations:

Article 3: We acknowledge for the holy canonical Scriptures, the Books of the Holy Bible, viz. Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. . . .

Article 4: The Books abovesaid teach this, that there is one God, Almighty, all wise, and all good, who has made all things by His goodness, for He formed Adam in His own image and likeness, but that by the envy of the Devil, and the disobedience of the said Adam, sin has entered into the world, and that we are sinners in Adam and by Adam. [5]

Another ancient confession from Morland contains these articles:

Article 1. We believe, that there is but one God, that He is a Spirit, Creator of all things, God of all, who is over all, and through all, and in us all, who ought to be worshipped in spirit and in truth, whom alone we serve, and to whom we give the glory of our life, food, raiment, health, sickness, prosperity, and adversity; and we love Him as one who knoweth our hearts. . . .

Article 12. We hold for the rule of our faith, the Old and New Testament, and agree to the general confession of faith, with the articles contained in the Apostles Creed, namely, I believe in God the Father Almighty, etc. [6]

The Waldenses were creationists, worshipping the God who created the material world, the God that the Manichaeans would not worship. They accepted all 66 books of the Bible as canonical, not picking and choosing as the Gnostics and Manichaeans did. There is no trace of Manichaean doctrine

on the creation or the evil nature of matter to be found in any extant Waldensian writings.

As we examine the views of the Waldenses on marriage, we would expect them to reject the Scriptural view of marriage as a divine institution (if they were Manichaeans) and to emphasize celibacy. The Manichaeans allowed only their second-class followers to marry, as a necessary evil, but those who would attain spiritual perfection among them were expected to avoid all taint of the material created world, including sexual activity within marriage. (Perhaps the Manichaean spirit lingers on among some modern evangelicals who teach, or at least imply, that young people will be more holy if they do not marry.)

How did the Waldenses feel about marriage? One of their pre-Reformation confessions commends that institution:

Article 9. We confess, that marriage is good, honorable, holy and instituted by God Himself; which ought not to be prohibited to any person, provided that there be no hindrance specified by the Word of God. [\[7\]](#)

The Nobla Leycon contains these verses:

It was a noble law that was given us by God, and written in the heart of every man . . . that he might likewise keep firm the marriage-tie, that noble accord or contract. [\[8\]](#)

The 1532 confession of Angrogne contains these clauses:

12. Marriage is not forbidden to any, of what quality and condition soever he be.

13. Whosoever forbiddeth marriage teacheth a diabolical doctrine.

14. Whosoever hath not the gift of chastity is bound to marry. [\[9\]](#)

The Magdeburgh Centuriators found the Waldenses to hold these beliefs concerning marriage:

Vows of celibacy are the inventions of men, and productive of uncleanness. . . . The marriage of priests is both lawful and necessary. [\[10\]](#)

Thus it appears that the Waldenses not only did not forbid or discourage marriage among their own adherents, but they also scorned the claims of the Roman Catholic clergy around them to possession of a greater degree of holiness as a result of their vows of celibacy. There is no hint of Manichaeian doctrine to be found in any pronouncements of the Waldenses on the subject of marriage.

It is true that there are many references to Waldensian pastors who remained single, but there is no evidence that they did so in the belief that celibacy would accord them a greater degree of holiness, or that there was anything unclean or defiling about the institution of marriage. Rather, these heroic pastors voluntarily gave up the opportunity to marry in order that they might be more effective in their ministry, which often involved daring missionary journeys to the far corners of Europe, carrying on evangelistic work in an age when such work often resulted in imprisonment and death. Monastier says:

It appears that some pastors were married; while the greater part were not so, though not on account of its being prohibited, but that they might be more free for the service of the Lord. [11]

Newman says:

Marriage was thought to be inconsistent with unreserved devotion to evangelistic work and was even dissolved in favor of such work. The ascetical principle was not carried by them to the extreme reached in monasticism, asceticism being regarded by them not as an end in itself but as a means to the great end of evangelizing the world. [12]

The Waldenses provide a splendid example for our young people today. On the one hand, they rejoiced without hesitation to enter into the married state, accepting it as a gift from God, without any squeamishness about it such as was felt by the Manichaeian dualists who regarded sexual activity as intrinsically evil. On the other hand, many Waldenses, like the Apostle Paul, exhibited a spirit of willing, ungrudging self-sacrifice, choosing to remain single in order that they might more effectively reach the continent of Europe with the Gospel. Their reward is greater in heaven today because they voluntarily gave up the good things that God provides us in this world, in order to seek the kingdom of heaven, doing so without ecclesiastical constraint or sentiments of self-righteousness.

The examination of Waldensian writings reveals no trace of Manichaeian doctrine or influence in any area of doctrine or practice; on the contrary, the

Waldenses strongly affirmed beliefs contrary to Manichaeian doctrine. Jones refutes the accusation by Robinson against the Waldenses (that many of them were Manichaeians) in these words:

It is a very questionable point, whether the sect of the Manichaeians had any existence at the period of which Mr. R. is treating, and I am strongly inclined to think they had not, at least in Europe. But even though that could be proved, I may venture to affirm that it was utterly out of the power of Mr. R. or any other person to produce from the confessions, catechisms, testimonies, or conduct of the Albigenses the least trace of Manichaeism. I am tempted on this occasion to adopt the lofty language of Dr. Allix, when defending the Piedmontese Waldenses from the same charge brought against them by the catholic bishop Bossuet: "I defy the impudence of the devil himself," says he, "to find in their writings the least shadow of Manichaeism." - Remarks, ch. 17. The fact is, that, on this subject, the catholic writers misled Mosheim and Limborch; and these latter historians have misled Mr. Robinson. [13]

The burden of proof definitely rests with those who would maintain that any of the Waldenses, at any time, were Manichaeians. The evidence is that most or all of them were Bible-believing Baptists, not followers of a half-Gnostic, half-Buddhist, half-baked dualist cult.

[1] Robinson, op. cit., pp. 299, 303, 311.

[2] Tierney and Painter, op. cit., p. 289.

[3] Newman, op. cit., pp. 194, 196, 197.

[4] Broadbent, op. cit., pp. 29-30.

[5] Morland, op. cit., pp. 30, 32.

[6] Ibid., pp. 37-39.

[7] Ibid., p. 38.

[8] Ibid., p. 102.

[9] Ibid., pp. 40-41.

[10] Jones, op. cit., pp. 48-49.

[11] Monastier, op. cit., p. 96.

[12] Newman, op. cit., p. 580.

[13] Jones, op. cit., p. 29.

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CHAPTER TEN

WHEN AND WHY DID THE WALDENSES CEASE TO BE BAPTISTS?

The previous chapters have shown that the pre-Reformation Waldenses were Baptists in all major points of doctrine, and have failed to uncover any evidence of unorthodox beliefs that would disqualify them as true Christians or as Baptists. However, we cannot drop the subject at this point, since it is admitted by all that the Waldenses of today are not Baptists, and have not been for centuries; they are Pedobaptists who practice infant baptism. When did the Waldenses change their doctrine on this subject, and why?

The evidence points to the historic year of 1532 as the time when the Waldenses ceased to be Baptists, as a result of their fellowship with the Reformers. Wylie describes this contact in these rapturous words:

A manifold interest belongs to the meeting of these two churches. Each is a miracle to the other. The preservation of the Vaudois Church for so many ages, amid the fires of persecution, made her a wonder to the Church of the sixteenth century. The bringing up of the latter from the dead made her a yet greater wonder to the Church of the first century. These two churches compare their respective beliefs: they find that their creeds are not twain, but one. They compare the sources of their knowledge: they find that they have both of them drawn their doctrine from the Word of God; they are not two Churches, they are one. They are the elder and younger members of the same glorious family, the children of the same father. What a magnificent monument of the true antiquity and genuine catholicity of Protestantism! [1]

Wylie's words must be taken with a grain of salt. While the Waldenses and Reformers would have found a remarkable degree of agreement on most

major doctrines, there were clearly disagreements as well. We have already seen that some of the Waldenses were upset by the Reformed emphasis on predestination and other Calvinist doctrines. There is every reason to believe that there must have been initial disagreement in the area of infant baptism as well, since the Lutherans and Calvinists insisted upon it, but the Waldenses, as we have seen, were throughout the Middle Ages declining to practice infant baptism. Jarrel cites a statement of Waldensian opposition to infant baptism as late as 1521:

Montanus is quoted as saying: "The Waldenses, in the public declaration of their faith to the French king, in the year 1521, assert in the strongest terms the baptizing of believers and denying that of infants." [2]

If the Waldenses of Italy were still opposed to infant baptism by 1532, they would have found themselves in a dilemma: they were in danger of extinction due to the persecutions of their Catholic oppressors, and desirous of an alliance with the newly arisen Reformers, but the Reformers were strong proponents of infant baptism and persecutors of the Anabaptists who refused to baptize their infants. The union of the Waldenses with the Reformers in 1532 could not have occurred unless the Waldenses agreed to practice infant baptism, and numerous historians have argued that the Waldenses did agree to become Pedobaptists at this time. Concerning the events of 1532, Waller says:

The Reformers were the bitter enemies and persecutors of the Baptists. They pursued them with as unrelenting and as merciless severity as ever did the Papists. They would not of course countenance these deputies from the Waldenses until they gave up their opposition to infant baptism. The fact, then, that no creed of the Waldenses, that no book or document of theirs, makes the slightest commendatory allusion to infant baptism, until at this time, in this creed, drawn up and adopted at the suggestion of the enemies and persecutors of the Baptists, by an assembly who reproach their fathers and their old ministers with "many and great errors" - these things, we say, furnish to our mind strong presumptive proof that infant baptism was then first introduced among any who could pretend at all to belong to the Waldenses proper. [3]

Vedder says:

Great ignorance came upon them, as is testified by the literature that has survived, and in time they so far forgot the doctrines of their forefathers that many of the writers saw but little difference between themselves and the

Romanists. Some of the old spirit remained, however, so that when in 1532 a Pedobaptist creed was adopted at the Synod of Angrogne, under the guidance of the Swiss reformers, Farel and Oecolampadius, a large minority refused to be bound by this new creed, declaring it to be a reversal of their previous beliefs. That they were correct in this interpretation is the verdict of modern scholars who have thoroughly investigated the earlier Waldensian history. [4]

Christian says:

On the eve of the Reformation, everything was on the decline - faith, life, light. It was so of the Waldenses. Persecution had wasted their numbers and had broken their spirit and the few scattered leaders were dazed by the rising glories of the Reformation. The larger portion had gone with the Anabaptist movement. Sick and tired of heart in 1530, the remnant of the Waldenses opened negotiations with the Reformers, but a union was not effected until 1532. Since then the Waldenses have been Pedobaptists. [5]

Orchard says:

It is certain that the ancient Waldensian church subsisted at the Reformation, and that they left off baptizing adults on their profession of faith. Whether all these churches of the brethren ultimately fell into the Lutheran community, and consequently were comprehended by imperial law, cannot be positively decided. It is plain here that the patience of the saints was worn out. [6]

Jarrel says:

Prof. Whitsitt says that no doubt the Waldenses altered their opinions under Luther's influence. [7]

Moser states that the Waldenses began to accept alien immersion at this time:

In Luther's war against the church, he sought the support of the Waldenses in order to defeat Rome. This struck a responsive chord with the Waldenses who had been persecuted for so these many centuries, and they showed some interest. However, Luther demanded a change in their practice of rebaptism lest he might be required to be rebaptized. . . . There were a few of the Anabaptists or Waldenses that went over to Luther and abandoned rebaptism just as you see some Baptists today, and the histories written of today will only record those defectors and omit the majority who refused to compromise and join in with the ecumenical activity. [8]

Though it is likely that many Waldenses retained their Baptist convictions after 1532, helping to give strength to the Anabaptist movement, the main body of Waldenses in Savoy cannot be regarded as Baptists after that year. Their identification with the Reformers from that time on is well-known. Latourette says of the Waldenses: "In the 16th Century the majority of the remnants were drawn into the family of the Reformed Churches." [9]

The union of the Waldenses of Calabria with the Calvinists in 1560 was the cause of the severe persecution unleashed upon the Waldenses in that year by the pope, with the result that they were completely exterminated in Calabria:

. . . in the year 1560, the Waldenses in Calabria formed a junction with Calvin's church at Geneva. The consequence of this was, that several pastors or public teachers went from the neighborhood of Geneva to settle with the churches in Calabria. It seems probable that this circumstance had contributed to revive the profession in Calabria, or at least had brought the Waldenses more into public notice than they had hitherto been; and it spread an alarm among the Catholics. . . . [10]

Meanwhile, the Waldenses of Savoy were drawn more closely into the Reformed fellowship as a result of the disastrous plague of 1630-1631 which wiped out the Waldensian clergy:

The plague subsided during the winter, but in spring (1631) it rose up again in renewed force. Of the three surviving pastors, one other died, leaving thus only two. . . . Of the Vaudois pastors only two now remained; and ministers hastened from Geneva and other places to the Valleys, lest the old lamp should go out. . . . Another change introduced at this time was the assimilation of their ritual to that of Geneva. [11]

Concerning the plague, Mosheim says:

They retained not a few of their ancient rules of discipline, so late as the year 1630. But in this year, the greatest part of the Waldenses (in Piedmont) were swept off by pestilence; and their new teachers, whom they obtained from France, (Geneva), regulated all their affairs according to the pattern of the French Reformed (Presbyterian) Church. [12]

Thus, the Waldenses of modern times should be regarded as Presbyterians, not Baptists, and according to Latourette some of the Waldenses have

identified themselves with the Presbyterians after emigrating to the United States:

Here and there, beginning about 1892, Waldenses, of the indigenous Italian Protestantism, began coming in small bands. Groups of them settled in several states and in at least one instance formed a congregation which affiliated itself with the Presbyterians. [13]

The roots of the distinctively Presbyterian doctrinal practices among the Waldenses, especially infant baptism, cannot be traced further back than the early 16th Century, when the Waldenses of Savoy, a dispirited, beleaguered, outnumbered band who had already deeply compromised themselves with the Catholics to avoid complete extinction, felt that they had no choice but to grasp the lifeline of fellowship and assistance offered to them by the newly arisen Reformers. It should come to us as no surprise that the Waldenses accepted the Pedobaptist teaching of the Reformers at this time, since many of them had carried their infants to the Catholic priests for baptism, doing so grudgingly in order to avoid possible persecution and death. Fortunately, by this time many Waldenses residing in other regions of Europe had passed on the torch of Baptist convictions to their successors, who became known as Anabaptists, Mennonites or simply Baptists.

[1] Wylie, op. cit., pp. 56-57.

[2] Jarrel, op. cit., p. 168.

[3] Waller, op. cit., p. 16.

[4] Vedder, op. cit., p. 126.

[5] Christian, op. cit., p. 82.

[6] Orchard, op. cit., pp. 252-253.

[7] Jarrel, op. cit., p. 159.

[8] M.L. Moser, Jr., "Ecumenical Movement and History," *Baptist Challenge*, January, 1988, p. 13

[9] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *Christianity in a Revolutionary Age, Volume 2: The 19th Century in Europe*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1959, p. 218.

[10] Jones, op. cit., p. 296.

[11] Wylie, op. cit., pp. 130-131.

[12] Quoted in Waller, op. cit., pp. 16-17.

[13] Kenneth Scott Latourette, *A History of the Expansion of Christianity, Volume 4: The Great Century in Europe and the United States of America, A.D. 1800 - A.D. 1914*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1970, pp. 279-280.

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CHAPTER ELEVEN

CONCLUSION: BAPTISTS EXISTED PRIOR TO THE REFORMATION, AND ARE NOT PROTESTANTS

There is clear evidence from a variety of historical sources that the medieval Waldenses were Baptists. It is true that they held to some doctrines or practices that would be rejected by many Baptists today, including refusal to swear oaths, pacifism, woman preachers, and belief in a so-called "Universal Church." But it would be a mistake to un-church the Waldenses for such deviations from the New Testament pattern, since in all major and essential respects their churches and doctrines were patterned on a solid New Testament basis, entitling them to be regarded as Baptists. Jarrel says:

Admitting that many of those in the line of Church Perpetuity could not be held in "full fellowship" with our best churches now does not in the least militate against their being regarded as real Baptist churches. . . . They were Baptist churches; but, like Old Testament saints, the churches of the first centuries, and those of the present, they were colored by their times. . . . Likewise, isolated, occasional and brief aberrations, even in essential matters, can not alter the nature of a church or prove it not a Baptist church. . . . Much less can we, for a moment, consider incidental errors in the history of our churches as entitled to any bearing on the succession question. [1]

If it is true that the Waldenses were Baptists, this is bad news for the interdenominational, ecumenical crowd who boldly claim that Baptists did not exist at any time prior to the 16th Century, and that the Baptists are merely

Protestants who came out of the Church of Rome during the Reformation like everyone else. The implication is that Baptists ought to work with other Protestants rather than maintaining a policy of separation. A good example of the modern party line on Baptist origins is the following:

W. Morgan Patterson, professor of church history, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Ky, . . . has this to say, . . . "As far as a historical written record is concerned, Baptists arose from the Separatists in England. . . . Most scholars have concluded that Baptists have not been Donatists, Paulicians, Waldenses, Albigenses, Anabaptists, or a half dozen other groups often included in their genealogy. . . . It is only after 1610 that one finds an unbroken succession of what came to be known as Baptist churches. Furthermore, only from about 1641 have Baptist doctrine and practice been the same in all essential features that they are today. It was in the latter year that immersion as a scriptural mode of baptism was recognized among them." [2]

The absurd charge that the English Baptists did not practice immersion before 1641 has been thoroughly refuted by Armitage, Goadby, Ray and other careful church historians. But even if that falsehood was admitted as truth, it would not prove that there were no other Bible-believing immersionists elsewhere before 1641. Many, if not most, of the 16th-Century Anabaptists practiced immersion; their Reformed enemies executed many of them by drowning, as a cruel parody on their Scriptural practice of immersion of believers. Modern historians would have us believe that the Anabaptists, many of whom were true Baptists, suddenly arose out of nowhere in various regions of Europe in the 1520's, and that there were no believers of that kind anywhere on earth before that decade. The Lutheran historian Mosheim did not teach any such nonsense:

(The Anabaptists) not only considered themselves descendants of the Waldenses, who were so grievously oppressed and persecuted by the despotic heads of the Romish church, but pretend, moreover, to be the purest offspring of the respectable sufferers, being equally opposed to all principles of rebellion on the one hand, and all suggestions of fanaticism on the other.

It may be observed, continues Mosheim, that they are not entirely in an error when they boast of their descent from the Waldenses, Petrobrussians, and other ancient sects, who are usually considered as witnesses of the truth in times of general darkness and superstition. Before the rise of Luther and Calvin, there lay concealed in almost all the countries of Europe, particularly in Bohemia, Moravia, Switzerland and Germany, many persons who adhered

tenaciously to the doctrine, etc., which is the true source of all the peculiarities that are to be found in the religious doctrine and discipline of the Anabaptists. [3]

Christian says:

Roman Catholic historians and officials, in some instances eye-witnesses, testify that the Waldenses and other ancient communions were the same as the Anabaptists. . . . The Mandate of Speier, April, 1529, declares that the Anabaptists were hundreds of years old and had been often condemned. . . . Father Gretscher, who edited the works of Rainerius Sacchoni, after recounting the doctrines of the Waldenses, says: "This is a true picture of the heretics of our age, particularly of the Anabaptists;" Baronius, the most learned and laborious historian of the Roman Catholic Church, says, "The Waldenses were Anabaptists." [4]

The myth that the original Baptists were believers within the Roman Catholic Church who came out during the 16th Century, as the Protestants did, is one that is dredged up repeatedly by modern historians. Supposedly the Baptists withdrew when the Catholic Church showed its true colors during the Council of Trent (1545-1563), as if the Catholic Church had not shown its true colors from the 13th Century onward when it established the Inquisition as a search-and-destroy unit against all who had Baptist convictions. In contrast to the theory of Catholic origins for Baptists is this statement by one of the most learned men of the 18th Century:

Sir Isaac Newton, one of the greatest men who ever lived, declared it was "his conviction that the Baptists were the only Christians who had not symbolized with Rome." [5]

Lumpkin, while emphasizing the Catholic origins of many 16th-Century Baptists, grudgingly admits their connection to the Waldenses:

The Baptist Movement appeared in Europe in connection with the left wing of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century. Efforts have often been made to trace the ideological sources of this movement to late medieval evangelical dissent as well as to the Reformation itself. It has not been proven, however, that the Baptist Movement has a genetic connection with any of the pre-Reformation evangelical groups. Leaders of the Swiss Brethren or Anabaptists of sixteenth-century Switzerland and Germany, in many cases having come directly from the priesthood of the Catholic Church, admitted no formal connection with or indebtedness to earlier sects, but declared their only

source to be the Scriptures. However, careful study of their teachings leads one to judge that they reflected the outlook and some of the distinctive emphases of such groups as the Waldenses. [6]

That many Anabaptist preachers and laymen were converted from the Roman Catholic Church does not prove that the entire movement came out of that church, any more than the presence of many converted Catholics within 20th-Century Baptist churches would prove that the entire movement came out of the Catholic Church at the beginning of the 20th Century and had no separate existence prior to that time. Logic, and the studied judgment of many church historians, support the view that the Waldenses of the Middle Ages blended into, and helped give rise to, the Anabaptists of the Reformation era.

Thus we see that Baptists have been a distinct people from the time of Christ to the present day. They did not come out from the Catholic Church in various, imperfect degrees of reformation from Romanist error, as the Protestants did, but preserved the apostolic truth from the beginning and did not need to be reformed. Although born-again Protestants and Baptists are part of the same family of God, they are not part of the same Church and never have been. Baptists and Protestants have never been united in a "visible church," and knowledgeable Baptists cannot accept the view of an all-encompassing "invisible" or "universal church" which has no New Testament support. There is no historical or theological basis for any ecumenical union or cooperation between Protestants and Baptists.

A study of the Waldenses thoroughly vindicates the traditional Landmark Baptist conviction that there have always been Baptist churches on this planet in all centuries from the time of Christ to the present day. Frank S. Mead described this belief in these terms:

There is a direct historic "succession" of Baptist churches from New Testament times; that is, Baptist churches have existed in practice, though not by name, in every century. [7]

J.R. Graves, who based this doctrine of Baptist perpetuity on Matthew 16:18 ("On this rock will I build my church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it") wrote:

I have no space to devote to the historical argument to prove the continuity of the kingdom of Christ, but assure the reader that, in our opinion, it is irrefragable. All that any candid man could desire - and it is from Catholic and Protestant sources - frankly admitting that churches, substantially like the

Baptists of this age, have existed, and suffered the bitterest persecution from the earliest age until now; and indeed they have been the only true religious organizations that have stood since the days of the apostles, and are older than the Roman Catholic Church itself. . . .

I am sustained by standard names among Baptists. J. Newton Brown, editor of *Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, a scholar who had given twenty-five years to the study of history, maintained that "the ancient Waldenses, Cathari, Paterines, and Donatists were our historical ancestors, and that a succession of whom continued up to the Reformation." [8]

Monastier says:

The Vaudois Church is a link that unites them (the Evangelical churches) to the primitive church. By means of it they establish the anterior existence of their constitution, doctrine, and worship, to that of the papistical idolatries and errors. Such is the object of the work we now lay before the public. It is intended to prove, by the fact of the uninterrupted existence of the Vaudois Church, the perpetuity of the primitive church. [9]

We have seen, from abundant evidences, that the medieval Waldenses were essentially Baptists. Thus, modern Baptists are justified in citing the Waldenses as a link in a chain of perpetuity of Baptist churches from apostolic times to the present. The burden of proof is on those who would deny that there have been Baptist churches in all centuries. The New Testament has been around for 1900 years, so it is reasonable to believe that at all times there have been those who believed the teaching of the New Testament, and who put those beliefs into practice by organizing independent Baptist churches. The Waldenses are among that noble host of believers through the centuries who dared to read the Bible, believe it, and put it into practice, in the face of fierce opposition. Let their example be an inspiration to the Lord's people today, so that we may do exploits as they did.

[1] Jarrel, op. cit., pp. 44-47.

[2] Quoted in I.K. Cross, *The Truth About Conventionism*, Texarkana, Bogard Press, 1966, p. 122.

[3] Quoted in S.F. Ford, *The Origin of the Baptists*, Texarkana, Bogard Press, 1950, pp. 27-28.

[4] Christian, op. cit., p. 85.

[5] Ibid., p. 84.

[6] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Judson Press, 1959, p. 11.

[7] Frank S. Mead, *Handbook of Denominations in the United States*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1985, p. 50.

[8] J.R. Graves, *Old Landmarkism: What Is It?*, Texarkana, Bogard Press, 1880, p. 86.

[9] Monastier, op. cit., p. 5.

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