

**WALDO AND THE
WALDENSIANS BEFORE
THE REFORMATION**

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Waldo and the Waldensians Before the Reformation by Emilio Comba

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By EMILIO COMBA,

PROFESSOR IN THE WALDENSIAN THEOLOGICAL COLLEGE, FLORENCE, ITALY.

TRANSLATED BY T. E. COMBA.

"La question de l'origine des Valdais nécessite un nouvel examen." — MURTON.

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PREFACE.

In the first number of "The Catholic Presbyterian" we read the following lines signed by the late Professor Peter Lorimer, D.D., of the Presbyterian Seminary of London:—

"It will be remembered by those who were present at the General Presbyterian Council in Edinburgh in 1877, that the condition of the history of the Waldensian Church was one of the subjects brought under the notice of the assembly. In the introductory paper read by me on *The Desiderata of Presbyterian History, and the Importance of Supplying Them*, I referred to the historical literature of that church in the following terms:—

"That eminently storied church has been fruitful in sympathetic historians, and down to our own times its long-settled historical traditions have never been seriously called in question save by its Roman adversaries. But in our own day these traditions have been thrown into the crucible of German criticism; and, if we should have to accept as valid and true the main results of this critical process, these would make no small change in the long-established views of the antiquity of that church and of the doctrinal relations and affinities in which it stands to the Reformation. We should have to conclude that the church of the Waldenses took its first rise from Peter Waldo towards the end of the twelfth century, instead of reaching back to the fourth or fifth; and that on a good many more points of doctrine and practice than we have been wont to believe, it continued down to the Reformation to coincide with the Church of Rome. The chief representative of

this somewhat trenchant criticism is Dr. Herzog, of Erlangen, whose study of the most ancient Waldensian literature has been very extensive and minute, and carried out in all the great libraries of Europe containing Waldensian MSS., and whose religious and ecclesiastical sympathies are all on the side of the Waldensian Church, and not of its adversaries. The question thus becomes an urgent one, what we are to think of this recent criticism coming from such a quarter at once so erudite and so friendly. We would all wish, I am sure, to suspend at least our own judgment upon it till we have heard the judgment of the Waldensian Church itself. We long to listen to the criticism of the Waldensian College of Florence. . . The able researches of Professor Comba, of Florence, are well known. . . We cannot but hope (and I have some encouragement from himself in this direction) to have the aid of his truly historical judgment, at once so independent and so circumspect, in coming to our final decision upon the interesting problems now referred to."

Moved by this invitation, so honorable and encouraging to me, I beg to respond to it, and to dedicate to the Second General Presbyterian Council, about to convene in Philadelphia, the following statements, very recently published by me in Italian, and now translated under my supervision.

I hope that the reader will find here the question summed up with some care, and even some additional notices drawn from new documents.

EMILIO COMBA.

August, 1880.

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As in a chain link is joined to link, and in the sea the waves chase one another, so in the middle ages do we see re-actions connect themselves and succeed each other. The cause seems to be varied, according to whether one has regard to mediate or immediate reasons, theological or historical. For instance, the Cathari, better known in Italy by the name of Patareni, derived the germ of their doctrines from old and Pagan traditions; but they increased and prospered in the midst of mediæval Christianity. And with regard to the Waldensians, if they drew their faith—the very cause of their existence—from the eternal word of Christ, yet only after that and other re-actions did they arise from the midst of noticeable events which indicated their origin. This, at any rate, was the opinion of the oldest narrators, to whom it will be well for us to return in order to get the thread of the true information concerning the origin of the Waldensians. These ancient witnesses are divided into two classes: first, the Catholics.¹

¹ See, for instance, the chronicles of BERNARDUS FONTIS CALIDI, ALANUS, STEPHANUS DE BORBONE or DE BELLAVILLA, apud DUPLESSIS D'ARGENTRÉ, *Collectio*, etc., Vol. I.; that of an anonymous writer

According to Catholic testimonies, the origin of the Waldensians goes back to Peter Waldo of Lyons.¹ This their opinion remains almost unchanged with their successors even to this day.² Has this no weight, because of adverse source?

It will invite suspicion, some one will tell us, if it finds no echo with the Waldensian writers, from whom, however, we wish to hear.

From various testimonies that came to light many years ago, it was legitimate to infer that the primitive Waldensians accepted the opinions of their persecutors concerning their origin.³ Now, the doubt upon this point is at last

of Lyons, ap. BOUQUET, *Recueil*, etc., Vol. XIII.; that of DAVID OF AUGSBURG, before called of Yvonetus, edit. of W. PREGER, München, 1878; that of PETER VALLIS CERNAI, ap. *Hist. Litt. de France*, Vol. XVII., and *Script. Hist. Franc.* of DUCHESNE, Vol. V.; that of RICCARDUS CLUNAC. ap. MURATORI, *Rer. Ital. Script.*, Vol. III.; some passages of WALTER MAPES, *De Nugis Curialium*, quoted by USSERIUS, HAHN, etc.; the *Summa de Catharis et Leonistis* of RAINERIUS SACCO, ap. MART. and DUR., *Thes. Nov. Anecd.*, Vol. V.; the works of the PSEUDO-RAINERIUS, ap. *Bibl. Max. Patr.*, Vol. XXV.; of MONETA, POLICHDORF, CLAUDE OF SEYSSSEL, etc.

¹ We will limit ourselves to a few quotations: "Waldenses autem dicti sunt a primo hujus haeresis auctore qui nominatus fuit Waldensis." — STEPHANUS DE BELL. "Auctor et inventor fuit quidam civis Lugdunensis nomine Valdensis, a quo sectatores ejus fuerunt taliter nominati." — RICC. CLUN. "Valdesios a primate ipsorum Valde dictos." — MAPES. "Hi Valdenses dicuntur a suo haeresiarca qui vocabatur Valdu." — ALANUS. "Valdenses dicebantur a quodam Valdio." — P. VALCERN. "Non enim multum temporis est quod coeperunt. Quoniam sicut patet a Valdesio cive Lugdunensi exordium acceperunt. . . . Vos venistis a Valdesio." — MONETA.

² The exceptions are not supported by any historical proof. See, for instance, BOTTA, *Storia d'Italia*, an. 1541-42. *Comp. Osservazioni sopra la Storia d'Italia scritta da Carlo Botta*, of G. B. SEMERIA, Turin, 1833.

³ Besides MONETA and a MS. of Strasburg an. 1404, in the *Niedner*