



# THE WALDENSIAN REVIEW



*Pastor Pietro Valdo Panascia (1910–2007)*

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Editor: Mrs Erica Scropo Newbury, 85 St Andrew's Road, Cambridge CB4 1DH.  
Telephone 01223-315753, email [ericascropo@hotmail.com](mailto:ericascropo@hotmail.com)

## From the Editor

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Thank you all for your continuing support, for your prayers and donations, all of which enable us to carry on with projects in Italy that would not be possible otherwise. We think it is particularly important to help the churches build a network among young people, thus encouraging them to feel part of a larger family and vision, both in Italy and in the wider world. It is still difficult to be a Protestant in Italy, because one has first of all to stand out and accept to be and to be considered “different”; and then because of the logistics of being physically isolated, often too far away from a church or a community to join in any of the various activities. This is even truer for the younger generations. That is why everyone is so grateful to us for providing the opportunity for all the Confirmation classes in Sicily to meet with ministers and youth workers for a long weekend, two or three times a year, during which they pray, read the Bible, discuss, share problems and opinions and get to know each other, thus building the Church of the future. The same is happening with the young people’s group of Forano.

In my last letter I told you that we will soon have a website. Unfortunately there have been delays, but I hope the day when we are cyber-connected to the wider world is not too far away.

In the past year we have lost a pillar of the Waldensian Church, pastor Pietro Valdo Panascia, and this issue is dedicated to his memory and legacy. In the next one we’ll remember an English friend of the Waldensian Church, Bill Cowhig, who left us in May 2008.

*ESN, Editor*

### *Letter*

Dear Miss Raddon

Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk, 4th February 2007

Many thanks for sending me your “last” copy of the history of the Waldensians. You may be interested to know why I am giving the talk on the Waldensians.

In 1944–5, as the Germans were retreating through Italy they maltreated the local population and there was a severe shortage of food. At the time I was in the RAF in Italy but we were forbidden to give food to the locals. With three or four of my colleagues I attended the services in the local Waldensian church in Naples and when we learned of their predicament we were able to assist in a small way to provide some food and other essentials. As we moved north through Italy we were able to assist other church members. I made the acquaintance of Pastor Deodato in Rome and Pastor Comba in Naples and several others whose names I forget.

Imagine my surprise when, 25 years later in 1970, one of my old colleagues received a letter from Pastor Deodato inviting us with our families to holiday in Torre Pellice. Thus in 1970 five ex-airmen with our wives and children (a party of 13) arrived back in Italy to be met at the station by Pastor Deodato who embraced and kissed the men and shook hands with the women (my wife thought this rather funny).

In Torre Pellice we were treated with every possible kindness. We were taken to the caves in the valleys where their forebears had fled, visited many places of historical (and current) interest, attended church services and choral concerts. On our last evening we all gathered for a farewell party in the main hall and one of the older members (I think he had come specially from Naples) read extracts from his 1944 diary: “. . . the boys from the RAF came again tonight and brought us . . .” — a most moving moment.

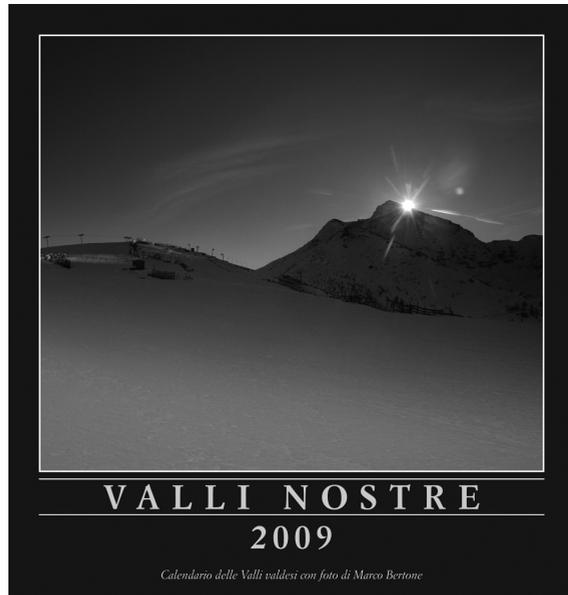
I suppose I was a boy then — but now I am 85 and my memory is not what it used to be — hence my request for the booklet which will assist greatly in my little talk to the ladies of our local church.

Thank you, and every blessing,

*Sincerely,  
Ron Moody*

## Waldensian Calendars

Once again very beautiful, with Biblical quotations in various languages: this year each back page is dedicated to John Calvin's 500th anniversary. They are still, unbelievably, available at the SALE PRICE!!! of £4.50 each (p&p included). Please send cheques (payable to Waldensian Church Mission) to Mrs Milvia Walker, 19 Forest Approach, Woodford Green, IG8 9BW. Don't forget your address! You can also have them sent to friends; if you want to do it cheaply yourself, roll them up in a little brown paper and save on postage. They will fall flat once in place and make a cheerful addition to your kitchen, study, hall.



## From the Chairman

Dear Friends,

You will be pleased to know that our plans to move the annual AwayDay & AGM meeting from its usual date in May to a new date in the Autumn have proved to be a success. The event had two very good speakers, Sir John Polkinghorne FRS and Tobias Jones journalist and author. The numbers who came were over double the usual number, and it was a very cheerful occasion. This has emboldened us to plan ahead for the autumn next year, slightly earlier, for 3rd October. A fuller report about the AwayDay will be in the next issue. However, if you are aware of something happening which may make 3rd October not a good date for it, do let us know!

In this issue we are remembering Pietro Valdo Panascia whose work in Sicily is well known, indeed he was the founder of “La Noce” in Palermo. He was the first to stand openly against the Mafia there. Sadly too we have heard of the death of a leading member of the URC Waldensian Fellowship, Bill Cowhig, and there will be a tribute to him in the next issue.

Amongst the grants we’ve been able to make this year, we’ve again been able to help the young people in Sicily. Pastor Peter Ciaccio from Forano Sabino, Italy, has also written telling us about how the work being done by the young people of Forano is developing, and will be sending photos of the youngsters involved. We would like to help them come and visit Cambridge with their pastor Peter. Such visits does wonders for their faith and understanding of wider Christianity.

Meanwhile, the Churches of the Valleys are still collecting money for the 3 children of Villar Pellice. You remember they lost their mother and younger sister plus their grandfather in the terrible flood of May 29th, and the Churches want to set up a fund that will help them in their future years. People can send money to us and we can forward it, so if you can help, please do so. God bless and keep you in the year ahead,

I trust and pray that you are keeping well in these difficult times,

*Yours sincerely,  
Eric Murray*

## Synod 2008

As usual Synod took place in the last week of August and it started with a “solemn service” in which three women were ordained ministers of the Word. Pastor Paolo Ribet preached on Deuteronomy 6: 4–9 about a Church that listens to her Lord when listening means also to open up to the others, to create a new relationship among people and nations. Giuseppina Bagnato, brought up in a Waldensian community in the South would like to show everyone — particularly young people — the Gospel as live and working Word (*parola*

*Pastor Paolo Ribet and the ordinands.*



*viva e operante*). Joylin Galapon, born in a Methodist family from the Philippines, despite having a degree in Biology, once in Italy worked as a cleaner. Thanks to the help of the Methodist church in Milan though, she is now a pastor and hopes to be able to make the communities she is in charge of grow. She believes that God, Whose call she answered, will sustain her in this task. Caterina Griffante, a librarian in an important institution in Venice, met by chance the Waldensian local church and is now hoping to be above all to do pastoral care “cura d’anime” thanks to her studies on the “Church of love” as explored by Paolo Ricca.

We often have reasons for complaining about the lack of knowledge and acknowledgement of other churches and cultures other than the Roman Catholic in Italy, particularly in the press. The common knowledge — the non church-goers are the worst!!! — is that all believers are RC, and that there is just one Christian Church, that being the Church of Rome. Nothing else exists. Worse is that, instead of being ashamed, they are rather proud of their ignorance and even feel superior to those who know more than they do. These are the kind of people who usually write the most ridiculous and often infuriating things in all sorts of newspapers, left, centre and right. It is those who ask whether Protestants eat meat and celebrate Easter and who anyhow do not believe they are Christians.

In recent weeks we have read that the financial crunch was all the fault of “Protestant Capitalism” (to which someone answered with a few “highly holy” names of ultra-Catholic fraudulent bankrupts such as Marcinkus, Sindona, Calvi, Tanzi etc...). Inaccuracies and offence can be registered nearly daily: the last major one was a Waldensian minister, Elisabetta Ribet, who was refused entrance to the Hospital of Palermo, in breach of the Italian law that gives her the right to see members of her congregation outside visiting hours.

From time to time, though, there can be pleasant surprises. Such was the completely unsolicited letter received by Moderator Bonafede from the President of the Italian Senate, Renato Schifani, a Roman Catholic and a member of the Forza Italia centre right party. This is what he wrote:

*The President of the Senate of the Republic*

Dear Pastoress,

Rome, 18 July 2008

On the occasion of the annual Synod of the Waldensian Evangelical Church I wish to extend to all participants my heartfelt and affectionate greetings.

The Waldensians have always represented, over the long centuries of their history, an important element of pluralism and of freedom, conserving their faith and their identity in the face of bloody persecution. From their original valleys to the communities spread throughout Italy, the presence of the Waldensian Church has constituted, despite limited numbers, a voice attentive to the most complex problems of our day and the Church carries great weight in its interventions on the national political and social stage.

I am certain that from the work of the Synod there will emerge important initiatives on the numerous questions close to us all, both as citizens and more importantly as representatives of the institutions of the State. Speaking of which, the question which you as Moderator, raised at the start of last year's Synod, is one that God has at all times posed to every man and woman: "Where do you stand in the world?". This should invite us all to pause and reflect, whatever our religious creed might be, and again is even more valid for one who holds political office.

The realism, the going to the heart of matters and the profundity which characterise the Waldensian approach to both faith and life, hold my sincerest admiration and constitute a veritable treasure for this country. These qualities still have much to give the national political life, which has certainly known and continues to recognise the commitment of important members of your Church; a Church which is so "Italian" in its history yet so politely and usefully "foreign" in its way of going about things.

I hope that the work of the Synod will give rise to the hoped for fruit, and that the Waldensians may always play an active part in the life of this country. Once again, my heartfelt esteem to yourself and all the participants and my sincerest best wishes for a successful Synod. Keep up the good work.

*Renato Schifani*

Richard Newbury was the delegate from the Waldensian Mission and Richard Grocott, who was a minister in Italy for a good amount of years, was the delegate from the Methodist Church of Great Britain. The reception for the foreign visitors was particularly moving this year because it took place — as it has in the last few years — in Villar Pellice in the church Hall which was the main centre for the coordination of help and support during the

dreadful flood that at the end of May badly hit all the Waldensian Valleys and saw Villar as the worst affected place, with 4 deaths. The volunteers helping in the kitchen and at table were the same church members who did a magnificent job during the flood emergency and received a big round of applause from all the guests.



*Villar Pellice Church Hall.*

Every year during Synod there is an event for a wider public with a panel of well known speakers debating about issues of general interest. This year a panel of journalists and academics, of which only one, Paolo Ricca, was a Protestant, were questioned and moderated by the Waldensian journalist and broadcaster Paolo Naso. The intriguing question was: "What space for Protestantism — if there is one — in Italian Society?" Despite the general feeling that the Italian society is growing either very secular — with no acknowledgment of the cultural and religious transformation Italy is undergoing through migration — or even more superstitious and superficial than it already was. Everyone agreed that more than ever before there is an opportunity opened for the Protestant churches. There is a gap and a certain thirst for independent thought and knowledge that the Waldensian Church and her sister Churches could and ought to fill.

A constant source of surprise is the growing number of people who decide to give the 8 per 1000 of revenue to the Waldensian-Methodist Churches. The 8/1000 is a device of the new Concordat signed in the 1980s between the Church of Rome and the State intended for getting extra money for the Catholic Church. This year the 8/1000 for the Waldensian Church is up by 13% with 264,000 signatures and it is a recognition from the Italian citizens of the good work, done in Italy and abroad with that money, of which none is spent for the Church itself. Transparency and trustworthiness are the reasons for which many Italian, including Roman Catholics, are happy to dedicate part of their taxes to the causes sustained by the Protestant Churches. The second choice in popularity is the tiny Lutheran Church.

On May 29th after a month of bad weather in Northern Italy in Villar Pellice in the Waldensian Valleys an entire hillside collapsed destroying Borgata Garin and burying a house and four people. Three were members of one family — mother, little daughter and grandfather — and were apparently about to get into the car to escape, having realised, albeit too



*The Pellice river after the flood.*

late, the level of danger. The fourth was a Romanian worker in the sawmill on the other side of the road. The pastor of Villar Pellice, Bruno Gabrielli, interviewed on National TV and papers, tried to convey the strong sense of solidarity expressed by the whole community. No public crying or wailing in front of the cameras but a lot of hard work: digging, sheltering, comforting, feeding. The whole valley was united in the effort and gathered for the funeral of the Poët-Rivoira family in the church of Torre Pellice because it is the biggest. Nonetheless hundreds of people had still to stay outside under the pouring rain because it was so crowded inside.

## **Disaster in North West Italy**

On 29 May the Waldensian valleys and the surrounding area were inundated with an enormous cloud burst. Some of the roads were like rivers with waters washing mud, gravel and stones along the carriageway. The river levels rose causing flooding and bank erosion. The debris in the rivers were trapped by the arches of the bridges resulting in water overflowing the bridges. Many bridges were closed either because they were impassable, damaged or unsafe to use. Rivers broke their banks and changed course. The amount of water in the soil caused landslides.

This was the general picture in the Piedmontese Alps from Aosta to Cuneo and there were fears, which fortunately did not materialise, that the water flowing into the river Po from its tributaries would be added to by further rain causing serious flooding lower down along the plains of the Po.

The greatest tragedy was the loss of life in the Pellice Valley. Fortunately it was the only loss of life. There had been almost continuous rain for some 6 weeks and the ground was soaked. On the morning of Thursday 29 May the sky was a nasty brownish black. 32cms (over 12 inches) of rain fell over 2 to 3 hours. The roads were running rivers and could only be navigated with extreme caution. At just after 10am on the Bobbio Pellice side of Villar Pellice a landslide swept away a house killing a 78 year old pensioner Carlo Rivoira, his 34 year old daughter in law Erika Poët and her 3 year old girl Annik. The father, who was at work, was left to bring up alone the remaining 3 children, who were at school at the time, and with no home. A 30-year-old Romanian who worked locally was killed when the same rocks crushed his car nearly flat.

There was a very near miss for some others. A wartime unexploded bomb had been discovered further up the valley and a member of the Carabinieri was driving up to defuse it accompanied by a local voluntary Red Cross ambulance in case there was any injury. At this time there was also a large tractor behind them. The Carabinieri heard a big noise behind him and looked in his mirror to see that the road behind him had disappeared. The ambulance was on its side over half submerged in mud and rocks. The tractor had been

carried along at the surface of the debris but its huge wheels were destroyed. The Carabinieri with the assistance of the tractor driver, who fortunately had not been buried, were able, with difficulty, to free the ambulance driver and the nurse. The ambulance was crushed like cardboard. Of the local Red Cross ambulances this was their only one of a special type. It had 4-wheel drive to enable it to get to difficult places on mountain roads and tracks. A replacement will cost £64,000 (Euro 80,000) even before it is



*The ambulance after the flood.*

equipped. Insurance did not cover the loss because the event was classified as a "natural disaster". An enormous fund raising effort is required.

Everywhere in the Pellice Valley and side valleys there was damage large and small. A document produced by the Torre Pellice Commune listed 62 places in their administrative area requiring large and small repairs. The Commune received Euro 5 million (£4 million) for urgent repairs but it has estimated that over another Euro 50 million (£40 million) will be required and that it will not all be available from the Government and the Region.

The mountains and their valleys have been created by glaciers and erosion over millions of years. This event was just a continuation of the process. Puny man and his works will always be at the risk of nature.

*Richard Walker*

## **England as protector of Protestant minorities: the early 18th century role of the SPCK Part 2**

Here is the second part of the article by this Japanese academic and friend.

Soon the SPCK's correspondence network expanded from Lithuania to the Italian free port of Leghorn. It began with the Pietists of Halle, in Germany and the Swiss divines, who were already well known in connection with moral reform and religious education. By the late 1690s news of the orphanage lately established by August Hermann Francke, a Pietist leader in Halle, had already spread to London. Interest in the Halle education system was so great that at the request of Thomas Tenison, Archbishop of Canterbury, two of Francke's students came to London and demonstrated their teaching

methods based on the ideas of Halle. In May 1699, only two months after its foundation, the newly born SPCK invited the two students to its general meeting to give 'an account of the school erected at Hall [Halle], in Saxony, by Professor Frank.' At this meeting Francke was chosen as the first foreign corresponding member of the Society.<sup>1</sup>

Meanwhile the Swiss reformers eagerly awaited an opportunity to make an alliance with English Protestants, since they regarded England as the guardian of the Protestant interest in Europe. In Switzerland around the turn of the century, the reform movements began to flower. Swiss divines had a particular reason to strive to strengthen their Protestant community. Placed in an awkward position by pressure from the Roman Catholic powers, backed by Louis XIV, they felt very vulnerable. When Robert Hales, younger brother of a Kentish baronet, who was eager to further the Protestant interest in Europe, travelled in Switzerland early in 1701, he found ready approval of the designs of the SPCK among Swiss divines. In fact they had already known of the foundation of the SPCK through their own network. With Hales's effort to make 'the Society ... enter into a correspondence with the whole body of the Helvetic divines' in order to 'promote Reformation',<sup>2</sup> prominent Swiss divines — Jean-Frédéric Osterwald in Neuchâtel, Louis Tronchin and Jean-Alphonse Turretini in Geneva, Samuel Werenfels in Basle, Anton Klingler the Antistes of Zürich, and Johann Jacob Scherer in St Gallen — joined in the correspondence with the SPCK.

Encouraged by this success, Hales expressed his intention to devote himself to the SPCK's service on the continent. Throughout the reign of Queen Anne he worked diligently around central and northern Europe as a most reliable conduit between the SPCK and continental Protestants. His main tasks varied from propagating the intentions of the SPCK, to distributing the Society's tracts: he had some anti-popery tracts translated into 'the Bohemian tongue', Livonian, Wendish, and possibly Russian. He also gathered information on the situation of the Protestants where they were in the front line against the Roman Catholic powers. In 1706 Hales wrote to the SPCK from Dresden that 'the Roman Catholics seduce many Muscovites to popery, upon pretence, that the difference between the Greek and Latin churches is not essential'. Thus, in order to save Muscovites from the hands of popery, he requested the Society to send 'a small treatise demonstrating the errors of the Roman Church, with regard to the Greeks'.<sup>3</sup> It was believed that the distribution of the books would have the effect of preventing the spread of Roman Catholic activities. The Society and its continental associates therefore combined in their efforts to distribute the publications of the Society across Europe. In 1708 Hales reported from Celle on the current progress of several translations he was involved with. This report illustrates well how extensively the SPCK gave attention to the state of Protestantism in Europe.

A letter was read from Mr Hales ... reporting that Mr [Heinrich Ludolph] Benthem superintendent [of the Lutheran church] at Uelzen a

little city about six German miles from Celle has almost finished his German version of Mr [Robert] Nelson's Festivals and Fasts, which he will cause to be printed, tho' he has received another translation of it from Mr Scherer. And that if he had had one of these books when it was first published, he would have caused it to have been translated into French by this time. That the Great Duty of Frequenting the Christian Sacrifice being translated into German by Mr Scherer junior, is now in the press, as also the Account of the Corporation Society [SPG]. The Christian Sacrifice he printed at Dresden the last summer, with a tract of Dr Woodward's in the Bohemian tongue, the number of Protestants there being still very great. That he has conferred with Mr Benthem about translating the Preservative against Popery into German which treatise they both approve of. He thinks to get it translated and published first in Russian, and then in the German, for several reasons, tho' it will be difficult to find a translator, the person who turned Dr Woodward's Soldiers Monitor into the Muscovite language being dead. That Mr Benthem has solemnly abjured the Roman Catholic religion, which for several years he had most zealously defended; that his recantation sermon has been printed and that he has now in the press a large treatise wherein he gives invincible proofs of the errors of the Romish Faith out of their received authors.<sup>4</sup>

Apart from Hales the SPCK apparently hired other agents. An agent called Wilkins was sent to France in 1712 to investigate the religious situation generally there. Wilkins picked up the news of the Protestant galley slaves, who had moved from Dunkirk to Marseilles in late autumn 1712, and spied on the Jacobites and English Roman Catholics. Possibly from his information, the Society wrote to Hales in 1712 that 'Popish priests come daily over to us from Dunkirk to pave the way for some design which they seem to be big of, and there are already many instances of perversion to their bloody religion, which show that they are not idle...'<sup>5</sup> In 1713 the Society was informed by another source:<sup>6</sup>

that from good hands within one year past 400 Jesuits and popish ecclesiastics were embarked for England to carry on their harvests, that they imagine to be so great in their parts that the Society de Propaganda fide [sic] have ordered all those of the three kingdoms that are abroad and capable to propagate Christianity to return to those respective countries: That these orders are to be punctually obeyed so that there are not enough left to say mass and some cloisters are entirely deserted by the Britains [sic], and in particular that at Liege &c.

Some figures in their information were very much exaggerated. Sometimes the fears of the SPCK became not far from paranoid fantasy. Some members

believed in the existence of popish assassins. In 1712 Dr Thomas Bray, a founding member of the Society, published a Protestant martyrology<sup>7</sup> but he did not reveal his authorship because he feared that the fate of Sir Edmundbury Godfrey, an alleged Protestant martyr at the time of the Popish Plot in 1678-9, would fall on him. Yet what has to be noticed is that the members of the SPCK assumed that they lived in an era riven by murderous ideological divisions.

*Sugiko Nishikawa*

### Notes

1. Society Minute, 11 May 1699, printed in *A Chapter in English Church History: Being the Minutes of the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge for the Years 1698-1704*, ed., by Edmund McClure (London, 1888)
2. SPCK, Abstract Letter, no. 283, printed in McClure, op. cit., p. 330.
3. SPCK, Minute Book, vol. 1, fol. 399.
4. *Ibid.*, vol. 2-4, fol. 61. For Heinrich Ludolph Benthem, see Heinrich Wilhelm Rotermund, *Das gelehrte Hannover* (Bremen, 1823), pp. 145-6; *Die Historische Commission bei der Königl. Akademie der Wissenschaften, Bayern, Allgemeine Deutsche Biographie* (1975; repr. Berlin, 1967), II, 342-3.
5. SPCK, Society's Letters, CS2/2, fol. 91. In May 1713, Newman asked Henry Austen at the King's Head in Dover, who was introduced to the committee by Wilkins, to send the SPCK a report 'concerning such popish priests or emissaries as come into England through your town.' Society's Letters, CS2/3, fol. 25.
6. SPCK, Secret Committee, fol. 6. The peak number of the English Jesuits was reached in 1710. According to Geoffrey Holt, the total number of English Jesuits was 353 in 1710; the number of missionaries in England and Wales was 127, in 1710. Holt, *The English Jesuits in the Age of Reason* (Tunbridge Wells, 1993), p. 3.
7. [Thomas Bray], *Papal Usurpation and Persecution, As it has been exercised in ancient and modern Times With respect both to Princes & People; A fair Warning to all Protestants, to guard themselves with the utmost Caution against the Encroachments & Invasions of Popery; As they value their Estates, Lives, and Liberties, but above all, as they would preserve their Consciences free from the forest of all Tyrannies and Oppression. The whole divided into two tomes, answerable to the subject matter, as it relates both to Princes and People; And designed as supplemental to the Book of Martyrs, as well in the several ages antecedent to the Reformation, where that is found defective; As by continuing the same most useful part of ecclesiastical History, MARTYROLOGY, down to these present times. By a sincere Lover of our Protestant Establishment both in Church and State. The Heart of the Wise is in the House of Mourning; But the Heart of Fools is in the House of Mirth, Eccles. V. 4.* ( London, 1712).

*[Third and last part in the next issue. — ESN, Ed.]*

## La Serenissima Repubblica della Val San Martino 1704–1708

Vittorio Amedeo II Duke of Savoy, Louis XIV King of France, Duke La Feuillade, the Waldensians of Val Pellice and the Waldensians and Catholics of Val Germanasca and Inverso Pinasca were the players in the birth of the “Serenissima Repubblica della Val San Martino” known pejoratively as the “Repubblica del Sale” (Republic of Salt).

In later Napoleonic times some names were changed to remove aristocratic or clerical connections and became geographic. Thus Val Luserna became Val Pellice and Val San Martino became Val Germanasca. In this story the earlier names, appropriate to the age, will be used: Val Luserna and Val San Martino.

When the War of the Spanish Succession started in 1701 Louis XIV promoted a series of wars in order to enlarge France and to improve the domination of France over Europe. The Duke of Savoy, commander of French-Piemontese troops, changed sides, becoming an ally of the Austrians of the Grand Alliance which included England. He overcame Franco-Spanish forces in various parts of Piemonte, suppressing Pragelato and Perosa Argentina and he prepared to assault the citadel of Turin.

After the about-face of the Duke of Savoy, Louis XIV sent Duke La Feuillade to Piemonte to conquer the territory of his former ally. On 12 June 1704, before entering into Piemonte, La Feuillade conquered Susa and sought to obtain the neutrality of the Waldensians who were the subjects of the Duke of Savoy. La Feuillade, who well knew the strength of the Waldensians, wanted to secure Pinerolo and their valleys. However, on 27 June 1704 La Feuillade entered Val Pragelato and descended on Perosa, cutting off Val San Martino



*A 2008 re-enactment of the events described.*

from the plains. The rest of the troops, divided into four columns, manoeuvred to converge on the Waldensian valleys. The first column, passing over French territory to the Colle della Croce, menaced the fort of Mirabouc at the head of Val Luserna. The second column entered Val San Martino, crossed the Colle del Pis and proceeded to Angrogna. The third column was tasked with occupying Pramollo, arriving from Lazarà. The last column followed the Val Chisone down to San Germano.

If in Val Luserna the French menace was not immediate, in Val San Martino the situation was untenable. With only some Waldensian companies present and the valley surrounded and cut off from the plain, it became apparent that there was a need to avoid war, separate from Savoy, and obtain a peaceful neutrality.

On 3 July 1704, at the French camp at Perosa, the Treaty with Val San Martino was concluded. It contained eight clauses. It conceded to the valley: a republican form of government, but with little autonomy, because laws had to be presented to the Government of the King of France for approval; liberty to hold Protestant services; the presence and permission to transit for occupying troops; the privilege of having at Perrero salt at "two soldi per libbra"; the liberty to trade in the whole of France without hindrance. The new republicans also obtained an additional provision: in case of danger the population of Val San Martino and Inverso Pinasca could retreat to the land of "Their Majesty".

The Waldensians and Catholics accepted the terms of La Feuillade, and with the parish priest of Perosa as an intermediary, sent the hostages requested, without returning the cattle taken from the French and without disarming. The captains of the militia were arrested and implementation of the clauses of the Treaty was begun. The Treaty was sent to Versailles and ratified with the royal signature on 24 July 1704. Behind the scenes it was said that the new State was most wanted by La Feuillade and it was accepted by the King purely as a military strategy.

La Feuillade, from his camp at Perosa, tried to obtain the same result in Val Luserna and San Germano, offering the alternatives of a Republic or the fate of an enemy country. The Waldensians of Val Luserna and San Germano refused and remained faithful to the Duke of Savoy. They resisted the French attacks, thanks to reinforcements that arrived with the Marquis Parella.

It should be noted that the Protestant service that was allowed in the Val San Martino was precisely that which was forbidden in Pragelato. It is also important to note that the Waldensians of Val San Martino seem to have requested to be considered as subjects of the King of France and for Val San Martino to be incorporated into the Kingdom of France. The King had refused, considering them only protected allies.

The Waldensians and Catholics of Val San Martino were preoccupied with safeguarding the valley from the war and avoiding further damage and looting of the type that had been caused by Vittorio Amedeo II in previous years.

Between the harm of King Louis and that of Vittorio Amedeo they chose that which seemed to be the lesser of two evils.

Contrary to expectations, the life of the Republic was initiated with the rattle of arms. According to Parella, the French who occupied the Republic looted Massello. On the other hand, according to La Feuillade, the Waldensians of Massello captured 400 sheep in reprisal from Val Luserna on 19 August 1704.

The Republic, which consisted of the territories of the current communes of Perrero, Pomaretto, Inverso Pinasca, Prali, Massello, and Salza di Pinerolo, existed from 1704 to 1708 under constant occupation by the French and Pragelatesi military. The area most easily attacked, via Colle Giuliano and Colle d'Abries, was Prali which had a garrison of 350 men as well as local militia.

On 13 August 1705 the Waldensians of Val Luserna took possession of the fort of Pinerolo for one night.

All the Waldensian pastors had fled. However, in early 1708 two theological students from Geneva, Leydet and Malanot, offered to carry out religious duties. After the end of the Republic the Synod of 23 October 1708 reprimanded them and declared that baptisms etc. carried out by unauthorised and as yet unconsecrated pastors were null and void.

Following victories by the Duke of Savoy against the French "the Rebels" took themselves to the ducal camp at Balboutet (Usseaux) and requested the pardon and forgiveness of the Duke of Savoy, which he granted

No records or documents of the administrative life of the Republic are known to exist, and there is no record of its leaders. However, the following names appear on the request for pardon: Gaspare Chiabrando ("public secretary"), the brothers Giacomo and Giovanni da Filippo, Nicola Peyrot and Matteo Bernard. Perhaps it was they who governed the little republic through assaults and incursions for four short years.

This article is a free translation, with additions, of the information published by "La Libera Associazione Valli Chisone e Germanasca" at the time of the 300th Anniversary of the Republic in August 2008 in Perrero. That information was in itself a synthesis of a number of sources, in particular the "Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi", No 84, December 1945, which deals extensively with the subject.

*Richard Walker*

### **Pietro Valdo Panascia (1910–2007)**

After a lifetime spent fighting for justice Pietro Panascia died the "death of the Just": quietly in his sleep in his favourite armchair after a light lunch with his beloved wife Pina. At 90 he had learned to use the computer and wrote the remarkable story of his family. Later he took a driving test in order to renew his licence and kept on driving his old Giulietta 1300 until nearly the day he

died. Even before being ordained a Waldensian pastor Pietro Valdo spent all his time and energy helping his neighbour, preaching peace and showing by his actions what amazing things good will can do, with God's help. He was a very kind man but behind his gentle smile there was a man of steel, who always knew where his place was and was never intimidated by power, violence or difficulty. Pietro Valdo — whom I always considered a relation since his brother had married an aunt of mine — was not a dreamer of utopias with unrealistic hopes: his feet were solidly grounded on the ground. Still, his beliefs in a healthy society where children would go to school and criminality would not be the only way of life open to them, might have looked like sheer fantasy had he not showed in everyday life that an alternative was possible. His father, Biagio, in order to overcome the plague of usury in the Sicilian village where he was a pastor, with a few honest young workers opened one of the first cooperative banks of Italy, at the very beginning of the 20th century. Pietro Valdo stood firmly against the Mafia: in 1963 he was the first to condemn openly and publicly an atrocious killing of five policemen, two soldiers and two civilians, by reminding everyone in big letters in posters all over Palermo that God forbids us to kill. The Catholic Church used then to keep silent and even tolerate the dominant culture of *omertà* but Pope Paul VI was impressed by the stance of the brave pastor of that small Church and tried to push the Sicilian RC Church in that direction. Cardinal Ruffini's answer was that the Mafia did not exist but was the invention of Protestant and anti-Sicily propaganda. Pietro Valdo not only preached but did everything possible in order to build: hope, bridges of ideals but also schools, refuges for battered mothers and children, a sewage system in the worse areas of Palermo, a more civilised way of living and thinking. In the late 1950s he started gathering children from the streets in the slum area called La Noce. Forty years later, thanks to generous donations also from our Mission and the free work of dozens of volunteers, the Centro Diaconale La Noce was a very modern and excellent school, a centre for the training of social workers, a refuge for single mothers, a host family for children at risk waiting to be adopted, a welcoming immigration centre, and much more. As the Director of Centro Diaconale, Alessandra Trotta wrote remembering its first Director, Panascia was an example also in the smaller things like when he did not accept widespread and accepted behaviour from a neighbour who started building an illegal extension. He reported it to the local authorities and won the case, breaking the habit of moaning but not acting against this kind of thing or much worse ones. With a small gesture that left everyone astonished, he sent the message that the mafia culture begins with accepting small illegality and threats and therefore it can be fought exactly starting from this kind of small detail.

In his last years he was worried about the growing worship of Saints, particularly the cult of Padre Pio, which for many is a substitute for God. He considered idolatry a horrible sin, but he was himself exactly the kind of person that everyone would consider a saint. Which means a good human being.

*Erica Scropo*

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Too good to be true? No! For every donation which you make to the Waldensian Church Missions, the Government will add a further 28%, providing you are a tax-payer.

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Some of you have already completed such a form, but for those who have not, I would urge you to consider seriously this opportunity for the Waldensian Church Missions to benefit from the Government's generosity, but more importantly, to enable our giving to our friends in Italy to be increased.



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## The Waldensian Church

It is the native Protestant Church of Italy whose origins pre-date the Reformation. It arose from an evangelical movement founded in the 12th century by Waldo, a rich merchant from Lyon, who was to inspire St Francis: he gave all away to the poor and started preaching the Gospel in the vernacular, which caused conflict with the Papacy. Travelling in pairs the Waldensian itinerant preachers, having learnt the Scriptures by heart, set off to found underground communities from Sicily to Russia. The ensuing persecution by the Inquisition drove them into their mountain fastness in the Alpine Valleys of northwest Italy, where they remain in what are still called the Waldensian Valleys. At their Synod in 1532 they voted to join the Genevan Reformation, a decision that brought even more persecution upon this exposed outpost of Protestantism. Their sufferings were recorded in Milton's famous sonnet "On The Late Massacre in Piedmont". Their survival down to the present has been a remarkable testament of faith.

The Waldensian community was emancipated in 1848, but did not reach full freedom until 1984. Since the Italian unification in 1860 they have established churches throughout Italy and, following emigration, in the USA, Argentina and Uruguay. In 1979 the Italian Methodist Church combined with them and they hold a common annual Synod, which is the controlling authority of the Church and takes place in Torre Pellice. The Churches of Rio de la Plata have their own Synod, Board and Moderator.

The 60 parishes have founded 120 outreach activities ranging from schools, hospitals, children's and old people's homes, radio stations, and ecumenical community centres, often catering for the needs of the most deprived and mafia-ridden parts of Italy, especially the disadvantaged South and the new immigrant communities.

The Waldensian Church has a theological college in Rome, a publishing house, Claudiana, and a weekly paper, *Riforma*.

### The English Committee of the Waldensian Church Missions

This was founded in 1825 as a support group for the Waldensian Church in Italy. Since 1979 its finances, together with those of the Vaudois Pastors Fund, have been administered by Trustees under the terms of the Scheme drawn up by the Charity Commission and dated 18 January that year.

The Committee seek to arouse interest and financial support in England and Wales for the Waldensian Church. Twice yearly we publish a *Waldensian Review* and occasionally other literature. We also arrange meetings for Waldensian pastors visiting this country and support students of Theology who want to spend the compulsory "year abroad" studying in this country.

There are similar Waldensian support groups in Scotland, Ireland, USA and in various European countries.

## **The English Committee in aid of the Waldensian Church Missions**

Established 1825

*President:* Mr Prescott Stephens, 49 Byron Court, Stockbridge Road, Chichester PO19 8ES.

*Chairman:* The Rev. Eric Murray, 137 Elmbridge Avenue, Surbiton KT5 9HE. Telephone 0208-399-8740, email ericmurray137@talktalk.net

*Executive Secretary:* Erica Scropo Newbury, 85 St Andrew's Road, Cambridge CB4 1DH. Telephone 01223-315753, email ericascropo@hotmail.com

*Hon. Treasurer:* Mr Mark Stephens, 5 Woodgate Close, Woodgate, Chichester PO20 3TA. Telephone 01243-545877, email mark@mstephens5.orangehome.co.uk

## **The Scottish Waldensian Missions Aid Society**

*Chairman:* Revd Ian Douglas, 49 Northesk Road, Montrose, Angus DD10 8TZ, Scotland.

*Secretary and Treasurer:* Mr D.A. Lamb, SSC, 36 Liberton Drive, Edinburgh EH16 6NN, Scotland. Telephone 0131-664-3059

## **The Irish Committee in aid of the Waldensian Church Missions**

*Chairman:* The Rev. Robert Dunlop, The Manse, Brannocktown, Co. Kildare, Republic of Ireland.

*Convenor:* The Rev. J.S.B. Drennan BD, 92 North Circular Road, Belfast BT14 6TN, Northern Ireland.

*Treasurer:* Mr Derek Seymour, 'Tanglewood', Pottery Road, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Republic of Ireland. Telephone 01-2850776

*The Waldensian Review* is sent twice a year to those who are interested in the Waldensian church in Italy, its history and present-day work and witness.

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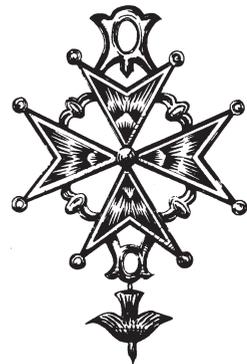
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