

THE WALDENSIAN REVIEW



No. 120

Summer 2012

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FROM the EDITOR

Dear Friends and Supporters,

Here are our latest news, some good, some not, as everything in life. In February our President **Prescot Stephens** ended his long and fruitful earthly life. Since 1948 he had held many different positions on the Committee and had been the indefatigable driving force within the Waldensian Church Mission. He will be greatly missed by a wide circle of people in Britain, in Italy and the wider world. Although his picture is on the cover, his obituary will appear in the Christmas issue.

Eric Murray is recuperating well and we were all delighted to see him at the AGM last October. **Luca Ghiretti**, 'our' student at Wesley House in the 2010–2011 academic year, has completed his degree in Theology at the Waldensian Theological Faculty in Rome, obtaining a First. He will now embark on a two-year training period, following which he will be, God willing, ordained. **Peter Ciaccio**, who has been a minister in Palermo for nearly a year, has written a successful book and his wife has given birth to a second son. Congratulations to him and Eva. **Claudia Lupi**, one of our guest speakers, a Methodist minister in London for some years and now in Sheffield, has had a third daughter. Congratulations to her and her husband, Pierre Ricco. **Daniele Pevarello** has just finished his PhD in Divinity at the University of Cambridge where he has been teaching and will teach also next year.

We have various novelties within the Committee: **Richard Grocott** is our new Chairman, **Alastair** and **Rachel Morris** have both joined it and Al is building the WCM website. And, after the passing of Prescot Stephens, Lord **Leslie Griffiths** has graciously accepted to be our Patron. (An introductory portrait for those who don't know him will be available in our Christmas issue).

Unfortunately the two **earthquakes** that hit Northeast Italy in May and June have caused extensive damage to the Waldensian church of **Felonica Po**, near Mantua. The building which includes the manse has had to be evacuated and the **Tavola Valdese** has launched an appeal to raise the €25,000 needed to repair it so as to restore its place of worship to this community once more. Meanwhile, in Sicily, the **Servizio cristiano di Riesi** has been ravaged by arson, causing damage to the farm equipment and the olive groves amounting to over €6000. No one was hurt in either of these cases, thank God. **Please be ready to send us your contributions if we start an appeal!**

I take this opportunity to tell all our readers that at Prescot Stephens' Memorial Service his family invited everyone to send donations to the Waldensian Church Mission in his memory. Cheques to be sent to the Hon Treasurer, Mr Mark Stephens, 5 Woodgate Close, Woodgate, Chichester P020 3TA. **Please be generous!**

LAST but not least: if you move, please remember to let us have your **NEW ADDRESS!**

Cover photo: Prescot Stephens (1918–2012).

WALDENSIAN CALENDARS 2013

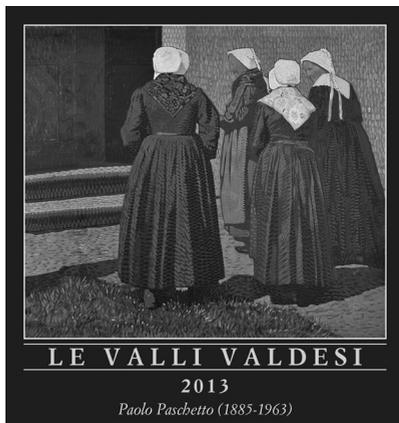
VERY DIFFERENT THIS YEAR!
A LIMITED EDITION

To mark 50 years since the death of the painter **Paolo Paschetto**, who also designed the insignia of the Italian Republic, the calendar has 'vintage' paintings of his beloved Waldensian Valleys. I am sure you'll love them!

**ORDER NOW TO AVOID
DISAPPOINTMENT!!!**

Unfortunately price and postage have gone up and the minimum at which we can sell them in order not to make a loss is now £10.50, including p+p. It is a big increase but it is going to stay that way for many years to come: please don't be discouraged, it would be sad to give up this lovely tradition of giving Waldensian calendars for Christmas!

PLEASE: send your cheques (payable to Waldensian Church Mission) to **Milvia Walker, 19 Forest Approach, Woodford Green, IG8 9BW**
Remember to include your address!



We can send them to your friends, just send their address!

Please continue to support with your prayers and financial help our work for the Waldensian Church and its Mission to an Italy which is in deep moral and financial turmoil.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you on **Saturday 13 October at our annual AWAYDAY** at Hinde Street Methodist Church in London. Do come and listen to some great speakers, meet new and old friends, buy books, **calendars**, biscuits, get updated about Italy and the Waldensian-Methodist Church.

*God bless you all
ESN, Editor*

FROM the CHAIRMAN

My name is **Richard Grocott**. I am a Methodist Minister who worked as a Mission Partner in Italy from 1993 to 2004. Since returning to England, I have continued to serve the Methodist Church as Superintendent Minister to the Ashford (Kent) circuit until last year and since then in South London at Battersea

AWAYDAY 2012

Saturday 13 October, 10.30–4.00

NOTE: NEW VENUE! Hinde Street Methodist Church
19 Thayer Street, London W1U 2QJ. Tube station: Bond Street

11.00 am Prof Sir Colin Humphreys, Dept of Materials Science and Metallurgy, University of Cambridge, will talk about *Science and the Truth of the Gospels: what really happened at Easter?* – a theme on which he has also written a book.

Peter Meadows will commemorate **Charles Beckwith**, famed benefactor of the Waldensians, on the 150th anniversary of his death.

1–2 pm Lunch (bring your own, drinks provided)

2.00 pm AGM: Richard Newbury will report on the Synod, **Mark Stephens** on the financial situation and the Executive Secretary on the work of the Mission.

Tea, bookstall, CALENDARS and the delicious '*biscotti di Debora*'

Please PUT the date of the AWAYDAY in your diaries NOW!
In order to save all funds for the Mission WE WILL NOT be sending reminders or invitations!

Mission and St John's Wandsworth in the Wandle Valley circuit. I have also, since my return to England, been a trustee of the Waldensian Church Mission and, at the last meeting, I became elected as the new chair in succession to Tim Macquiban.

Whilst in Italy, I served two appointments. I was sent out by MCOB in 1993, with my wife Carol, and my then new-born son, John, to serve as Minister to the English Language Methodist Church at Ponte Sant' Angelo in the Centre of Rome. This was, and still is, a multiracial congregation, which brought together Christians from all over the world (25 nationalities at one time) living and working in Rome in a variety of occupations from Embassy staff to domestic workers. We really loved living and working in Rome, the opportunity to move in interesting ecumenical circles (we were the closest Protestant Church to the Vatican), to visit so many of the wonderful historic sites of the eternal city, to learn the Italian language and to begin to get to know more about my brothers and sisters in the Waldensian church. I was regularly seen at Tavola headquarters on Via Firenze and at the Church and Waldensian Faculty on Piazza Cavour.

However, after five years in Rome, as a family we felt ready for a new challenge, and in particular I spoke to the then President of OPCMI, Valdo

Benecchi, about the possibility of serving in an Italian Language congregation. So it was that, in September 1998, we moved to the City of Padova [Padua], in Northeast Italy where for a further six years, I served as minister to the two Methodist congregations at Padova and Vicenza. Padova is a university city and our congregation reflected the scholarly nature of the city; Vicenza was very different, a growing industrial city into which a large number of West African migrants were arriving, seeking work in the steel mills. Many of them were Ghanaian Methodists and Presbyterians and during our time we were glad to see an increasingly large number worship in our church, where they found a place of warmth and welcome.



My son, John, went through Italian ‘scuola elementare’ [primary school] in Padova. He really thrived in this environment and became a very fluent speaker of Italian. When it came close to the end of this cycle of his education, we thought the time was right for us to return to Britain, and hence our move to Ashford in Kent in 2004.

We frequently return to Italy; we own a small holiday flat on the shores of Lake Caldonazo in Trentino, we keep in touch with lots of friends in the Waldensian and Methodist Churches in Italy and I was privileged to spend part of my 2009 Sabbatical studying at the Waldensian Faculty. I continue to feel a great sense of passion for the Italian Mission of our Waldensian brothers and sisters. Their unique contribution to the spiritual and cultural life of Italy is so very important and deserves our every support.

I am deeply flattered to have been elected to this role by the Waldensian Mission. In many respects I feel somewhat overawed by it all! But I hope that with your prayerful support we can continue the work of our committee with enthusiasm!

*May God bless you all.
Yours sincerely,
Richard*

AWAYDAY 2011

On 8 October in the French Protestant church we had the unusual gift of three different speeches. Rev Dr **Tim Macquiban** talked to us about the conference he attended in Rome to mark 150 years of Methodism in Italy (coinciding with 150 years since that country’s unification). You can read the second part of his paper in this issue.

Since the 25th anniversary of Primo Levi’s death was approaching, I thought

of inviting his biographer **Ian Thomson** – who has at various times underlined Levi's strong links with the Waldensians and the Waldensian Valleys – to talk about him. Last, but not least, we had **Rachel** and **Alastair Morris** describing their three years in Turin and of being part of the Waldensian church of corso Vittorio. Their profiles and talk will appear in the next issue.

British Methodism and the stirring and support for democracy and freedom in Italy in the 1840s and 1850s

Part 2

Methodist Missions

Three particular factors prepared the ground for the decision of British Methodism to join in the process of the evangelization of Italy as part of its expanding mission programme. The first was the judgement that the Pope and Catholic princes of Central and Southern Italy would not give up their oppressive policies. This increased fears concerning the resurgence of Catholicism made particularly acute by the restoration of the Catholic hierarchy in Britain in 1850–1 and hardening Catholic dogma promulgated by the Pope. Wolffe comments that 'this became centred on the support for the Italian struggle for liberty against Austrian and Papal oppression'. Such Catholicism was perceived to be 'hostile to social progress, to personal morality in sexual matters, and to political liberty'. In 1858, articles in the *Methodist Magazine* had a review of the continent of Europe pointing to such dangers, singling out the persecution in Tuscany as but one example of repressive policies. Citing the case of the arrest and imprisonment 'of two virtuous individuals condemned to the galleys and hard labour for the crime of loving the Bible', it gave much space to the well-publicized 'example of religious persecution which excited such abhorrence at the treatment of Francesco and Rosa Madiari of Florence'. Lord John Russell, to become British Prime Minister, led the campaign for their release, defending the right of the British government to interfere 'against the use of the civil sword to punish religious opinions'. That a British subject, Miss Cunninghame, was subsequently arrested for the distribution of tracts added to the war of words in *The Times* and British religious press directed with righteous indignation at Italian Catholic regimes.

Secondly, there was a growing religious backlash which fed this Anglo-Protestant policy of Lord John Russell and others. Protestant societies, such as the British and Foreign Bible Society which produced these bibles for distribution, the Religious Tract Society, the Evangelical Continental Society and many others including the denominational Missionary Societies, all agitated for political pressure in support of religious freedom. The move to help the evangelization of Italy gained ground in the late 1850s, as evidenced by a pamphlet written for the *Christian Times*, based on the travels of a supporter of the Foreign Aid Society. It records helping causes in Genoa and Turin, in encouraging prayer and bible reading despite the risk still of arrest and imprisonment in some parts other than Sardinia. The writer observes that, while the spirit of religious free-

dom is sought, there was 'little or no faith in political change from politicians or democrats'.

In 1851, M. Revel, the Moderator of the Waldensian Church, Sr Saffi and Dr Achilli, addressed the conference of the Evangelical Alliance on the religious state and prospects for Italy. Dr Achilli was at the time defending his position in the courts in a vicious libel action concerning his alleged paternity whilst a Roman Catholic priest in Italy before his conversion to Protestantism. This case brought no credit to Catholic leaders who pursued it in June 1852. At the conference, they applauded the tolerance granted in the Piedmont since 1848 with the proclamation of liberty of worship in the Kingdom of Sardinia, seeing it as 'the dawning of a better day', despite continuing difficulties and persecutions at the hands of the catholic majority. 'God', they declared, 'crowns with temporal prosperity that only Italian State in which there is any degree of religious liberty'.

Salvatore Ferretti, resident in London and active in mobilizing his compatriots in fighting for Italian liberty, encouraged the British and Foreign Bible Society to support his work in training Italian girls as governesses. In 1860, he reported further on the *Progress of the Gospel in Italy*, citing the example of the Grisons, an evangelical group living not far from Milan, and pointing to the growing work in the cities of Alessandria, Florence, Venice and Naples. 'Even in Rome itself', he concluded, 'in the very palace of the Vatican, there are brethren who pray for the evangelization of Italy'. The Pope himself he denounced as 'against all the free and enlightened institutions which form the civil prosperity of Europe'. He contributed to the *Eco di Savonarola*, a religious periodical published to remember 'the atrocious acts of the Papacy ... and the national glory of the first cry for the Reformation having issued from Italy' (a view that the native lands of Waldo and Wycliffe and Hus might want to take issue with!). Ferretti's colleagues, Mapei in Liverpool and di Menna in London, worked among the evangelical communities of those cities to raise awareness and support for Italian Protestantism. Spini concludes that these were examples where 'political liberalism and religious nonconformism mixed together feed the warmest feelings towards the Italian cause'. Sadly, this was not to prove the case in relationships between Britain and Ireland.

William Arthur

This Irish Methodist minister, who served British Methodism as Secretary for WMMS for nearly 20 years, was foremost in bringing an awareness of the needs of Italy to his church. He was a powerful advocate of the Methodist work in both Italy and India, the which he was actively involved in initiating. His publication, on his return from the peninsula in 1860, of *Italy in Transition* excited intense interest through the power of the written word (it went into six editions) and his addresses at missionary meetings and public lectures. His work is full of vivid examples from personal conversations and encounters, setting the gospel against the claims of the Papacy, which he views as 'unbiblical, untrue and

corrupt'. Dedicated to 'one of England's best sons and one of Italy's warmest friends, the Seventh Earl of Shaftesbury', it gives his support to the new birth of the Italian people as a nation. To the Protestant Alliance and the WMMS he presented the time as one of great opportunity, encouraging support, believing that Italy was ripe for conversion and change. In April 1861, he wrote to *The Watchman* enclosing a copy of a letter from Florence assuring its readers of a change of attitude on the part of the new Italian government to the preaching of Gualtieri and others. Here was one who sympathized with 'awakening Italy' in a way which won support for the cause of Methodist involvement in the process of evangelization. It was his backing which gave voice to growing protestant and Methodist support for missions to underpin the political reforms of 1861.

Conclusion

Fifty years later, the *New History of Methodism* (1907) concluded that this was 'one of the most important movements towards progress in modern Italy. For the presence of well-organized, energetic Protestant churches is the truest contribution to the revival of liberal ideals and the "safest" modernism in Italy. They alone can save the social and doctrinal revolution ... from becoming anti-Christian and anti-religious. A warm hearted experimental Christianity ... will be an antidote to atheistic excesses and the salvation from ecclesiastical tyranny and superstition.'

One hundred and fifty years later, we may want to challenge and question that conclusion, whilst recognizing the importance of the issues of the relationship of Church and State, of religion and politics that our Wesleyan legacy has left us to ponder over.

Tim Macquiban

The Genesis of *If This is a Man*

Part 1

In February 1944, Primo Levi was deported to Auschwitz with 650 other Jews. Only 490 have since been identified, of whom 24 survived; the rest are officially classed as 'persons unknown' and have vanished without trace. Following his return to Italy in the autumn of 1945, the need to bear witness was so intense that he began to record, pell-mell, thoughts and events, conversations, things heard and seen at Auschwitz, on the back of train tickets, scraps of paper, flattened cigarette packets – anything he could find. This frantic note-taking was in readiness for something extraordinary. 'Probably if I'd *not* written my book, I'd have remained one of the damned of the earth', Levi told me. He was referring to Dante, the state of souls after death. Driven to tell his story, Levi completed *If This is a Man* within 10 months.

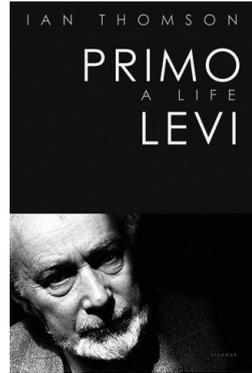
During his year-long captivity in Auschwitz, Levi had grown up appallingly. His innocence and much of his emotional life had been ripped out of him. Malnutrition oedema – swelling of the tissues caused by fluid retention

from a low-protein diet – had left Levi’s face tumid and bloated. But, in spite of his swollen aspect, friends and family continued to exclaim: ‘How strange! You haven’t really changed.’ Indeed, to judge by his fat-looking face, it was assumed he had eaten abundantly and well. More than 6,800 Italian Jews – one-fifth of the country’s Jewish community – had perished in the Nazi camps. Virtually every Jewish family in Italy had lost a relative or friend. Levi’s immediate family – his mother and sister – had survived, at least, and the house was still standing. (Levi’s father, an industrial engineer, had died of cancer in 1942.)

The house was scarcely habitable after the Allied bombardments, however, and much of the family furniture had to be retrieved from the cellars of the ex-Gestapo headquarters at the Albergo Nazionale in Turin. (The hotel had been requisitioned by the Germans and turned into torture chambers as well as a warehouse for all the loot stolen from the city’s Jews.) Thirty per cent of housing in Turin was destroyed or damaged, half the streets, roads, bridges and railways were rubble. Ester, Primo’s mother, was much concerned with finances for the year ahead; but her son, hurled into the unaccustomed role of bread-winner, was too mentally distraught to look for work. He no longer had the same enthusiasm or believed in people the same way.

Levi was in trauma, and disturbed in a way that only survivor friends could understand. After the nightmare intensity of Auschwitz, everything seemed colourless, futile and false to him. ‘I had the sensation that I was living’, he told me, ‘but without being alive’. Moreover, the habit of civilization seemed very fragile in Levi. A friend was shocked to see him attack a wild persimmon bush on a walk one day, chewing on the fruit. On the first night of his homecoming, he had slept under an SS eiderdown purloined from the camp, a chunk of bread secreted under his pillow: his own soft bed seemed an impossibly civilized amenity after his 11 months of incarceration and railway vagabondage.

Like all exiles, Levi felt that he had come back to a different world that had moved on without him. Everywhere he went, Italians spoke fearfully of Russia’s threatened atom bomb. They asked how long it would be before there was a Red Square in Rome; new class wars were prophesied with a final catastrophic crumbling of Italy’s postwar society. But Levi, having been rescued by the Red Army from the camp, was unable to share the establishment’s anti-Communism: Soviet Russia was no democracy, he could see that, yet without Stalingrad the Nazis might have won the war and all Europe would now be a vast German colony. Levi’s instinctive pro-Sovietism only added to his feeling of loneliness and alienation. To aggravate matters, suddenly it appeared that no Italian ever had been a Fascist. As if the word ‘new’ could expunge a newspaper’s murky Blackshirt past, Turin’s daily *La Stampa* was



renamed *La Nuova Stampa*. (Such was the national genius for adapting to circumstance.)

Hunger and disease were predicted for the deepening winter of 1945, and the onus was on Levi to find work. Hoping to rebuild his career as a chemist and to re-establish links with friends, he began to journey to and from Milan, where he had worked briefly before his arrest. Like Turin, the Lombard capital was a wounded city full of bomb damage, but life had revived, the newspapers were coming out, the theatres had reopened. And it was about now, with his mind set on exorcising his ordeal in a book, that Levi said he began to buttonhole passengers on the Milan–Turin express, and tell them of what he had seen and suffered. Soon he was talking to strangers in the street, on the trams and buses that were beginning to run again, reporting his story to anyone who cared to listen. The compulsion to do this was overwhelming: he saw himself as a storyteller returned from the edge of civilization, with urgent counsel for his listeners and made no apology for his compulsive talkativeness. Talking was his way of finding consolation and himself again: he felt renovated and released by it.

For the moment, the moral duty to bear witness to Auschwitz was secondary, I think, to Levi's compulsive desire to disburden himself of his story. On the crowded train between Turin and Milan, surprisingly, no one told him to lower his voice. One commuter even politely asked Levi if he could speak up as he was hard of hearing. Another asked Levi's permission to eavesdrop on his conversation as it sounded, he said, so 'incredible'. These must have been amazing moments for Levi, which showed him that a potentially huge audience – not just his circle of acquaintances – wished to hear his chronicle. Only once did a commuter, a priest, ask Levi why he had to address strangers with such a malignant-sounding story. Levi replied that he could not help himself. It was a sign perhaps that he was emerging from the depths.

At first Anna Maria Levi could not bear to hear her brother talk, as her boyfriend had perished in the camps. But gradually she too began to listen. Primo was as a born storyteller, everyone today says as much. One friend, Mila Momigliano, was astonished by his mesmeric gift. Each day for a week in the last cold months of 1945 Levi visited Momigliano's bedside while she was recovering from bronchitis. During these visits he provided Mila with a detailed chronicle of his survival. Later she told me: 'I'd lie in bed spellbound, without moving or uttering a word'. After he left, however, Mila had to force herself to play the piano in order to exorcise what she heard. If she was shocked, Levi wanted it that way: what he had to say was horrible and, as he cast his narrative spell, he demanded silence from his audience and brooked no interruptions. When a friend jokingly enquired about the Auschwitz brothels, Levi turned away in disgust.

As Levi sat by Mila Momigliano's bedside, he was creating blow-by-blow the book that was to become *If This is a Man*. With endless retellings he was refining the subtle plays of suspense and pacing which would hold a reader's

attention on the page. He was literally talking his masterpiece into life. Yet many found Levi's manner of narration oddly impersonal, even chilling. He seemed to be talking about someone else's life, not his own at all – almost as though he was making an official statement. Many wondered how he could sit there and tell his ghastly tale with such an outwardly tranquil heart.

By the early spring of 1946 Levi had written 14 poems, a considerable flurry amounting to a fifth of his entire poetic output. The verse bristles with the influence of Dante filtered through T.S. Eliot. And the more poetry Levi now wrote, the more he adapted lines from Dante's the *Divine Comedy*, even if only by analogy, to communicate the spiritual No-Man's land of Auschwitz.

Before he could chronicle the story of his persecution in prose, the rage had to be excised first in poetry. Far from being an afterthought to the cool analytic prose to come, the verse was a vital part of the book now incubating.

Ian Thomson

TO BE CONTINUED

Mayoral Visit to the Waldensian manuscripts of Cambridge University Library

Inspired by reading Sergio Velluto's thriller about ancient Waldensian documents, I proposed to the then Mayor of Cambridge, Dr Ian Nimmo-Smith, a visit to the Waldensian manuscripts held in the University Library, which he enthusiastically accepted, given the double connection with University and City and because he had in the past visited the *College of the Barba* whence they originated. The Cambridge connection goes back to Oliver Cromwell, since it was the Lord Protector who not only rescued the Waldensians from total extermination



but also commissioned his ambassador at the Court of Turin to find as many manuscripts as he could and take them into the safe haven of Protestant England. On 17 January a group of nine people – four belonging to our Committee: myself, Richard Newbury, Tim Macquiban and David Thompson – plus Margaret Thompson, the Mayor, his Chaplain Nick Moir, Bill and Carol Pickering, gathered in the hall of the University Library to be

met and escorted by another Committee member, the librarian Peter Meadows. In the Geoffrey Keynes Library the precious little books, each of them lying on its lovely little cushion, were greeted by this group of bibliophiles who for about an hour read, commented, interpreted their contents with surprise, interest, admiration. The *Noble Lesson*, a poem written in the Waldensian language and summarising their beliefs, the dates changed in some documents in order to make them appear older, hence supporting the theory that the Movement preceded Waldo and had apostolic links, even the little volume with Latin grammar and Maths, everything spoke of intense study and deep faith.

Their story, though adventurous, is yet not quite the one narrated in Velluto's thriller. The young ambassador, ex-academic Samuel Morland, on the advice of the old Irish Archbishop James Ussher, expert on Waldensian history, had received them from the Waldensian pastor and historian Jean Léger in Geneva and had deposited them in the Library of his University, as instructed. They were not found by Canon Gilly when he was researching for his books, though, and the conclusion was that under James II the Papists had destroyed them. In truth they had never changed place, but they were under a new classification.

Ian Nimmo-Smith said he was honoured and moved to be able to hold



in his hands such a witness to that dangerous and tenacious battle for the freedom of religion and of conscience. Everyone's thought went to those Christians who today risk prison and persecution because of their faith. We all went back to our commitments reinforced in our belief that the knowledge of History is paramount to the understanding of the present and to living it trying to avoid the mistakes of the past.

ES

'How shall I sing the Lord's song in a strange land' – when there are no Wesley hymns in the hymnbook?

After 3 years as a lay chaplain to students and 6 years as a Methodist minister in various parts of London, Alison Walker arrived in Florence in 2009 with her husband Robin. I met her for the first time in Torre Pellice, of course, and we immediately found some common grounds: the Cambridge connection and ... the standard Poodle! She comments on her experiences:

I have been living in Italy since September 2009, at first to learn the language and then from Christmas 2009 to live and work as Mission Partner at Florence Methodist Church (take a look at firenzechurch.com). There are several questions that normally arise at this point:

Did you speak Italian before you came to Italy? No, that would have been too

easy! We had some lessons in the UK and the 20 weeks at language school here. This did mean that the first sermon I understood in Italian was the one that I preached in Italian, and if I'm honest, listening to formal language for more than 45 minutes is still rather difficult.

Why did you come to Italy? The job was advertised in the *Methodist Recorder* – a church, with work with immigrants and children & young people, in the centre of Florence. It sounded interesting.

Have you always wanted to live in Italy? No. But I have always wanted to serve the worldwide Methodist Church: my great-uncle was a Minister in Jamaica for about 40 years, and he always inspired me to embrace global Methodism and I felt that the call to serve globally was part of my call to ordained ministry. Perhaps I imagined a more exotic place, but at least in Italy there is the hope of work for my husband (organist, director of choirs and orchestra). Oh, and we were able to bring the dog!

Ah, the dog – she's famous isn't she? Yes, a standard poodle around the streets of Florence has helped us create relationships with the locals ... although we are invisible and unrecognised without her. Gabrieli (name already chosen long before, and yes, a girl) also enjoys her summer break in Piemonte for the Waldensian Synod.

Did you know about the Waldensians before coming to Italy? Once again, no. I had studied Reformation history, but no mention was made of the Waldensians. I found their history very interesting, and their present sometimes rather challenging!

... meaning? I enjoy being part of an openly liberal church: for example, the debate, although still contentious, is about how and when to bless gay relationships, not about if it's OK to be in a gay relationship. But sometimes, I think the search to be open to everyone has caused the church to go a bit off track – I am involved with two summer camps for young people, and the idea of talking about Christian faith and teaching the Bible has created quite a debate! I find the church life here fairly formal, and traditional. There can be great resistance to any music newer than the Reformation (yes, really, see the debates on Facebook!) and it is to my total amazement that the shared Waldensian, Methodist and Baptist hymnbook contains NO Wesley hymns and very little that is recognisable Methodist in theology. OPCEMI (Opera per le chiese evangeliche metodiste in Italia) is trying to remedy this situation, but I fear it may be too late. The commitment of the Methodist and Waldensian pastors is very inspiring – the church recognises the need to encourage younger vocations and to invest in solid theological training; the result is younger, highly skilled pastors, with a desire to serve the church for many years. My own training (on the Eastern Region Ministry Training Course) was excellent, but I don't know Hebrew or Greek, I've never read a whole book



by Bonhoeffer or Barth ... on the other hand, I had been preaching for 10 years before I started work as a minister and I think my pastoral, practical training was far deeper than what the students at the Facoltà have received.

What about life in Florence? This is a beautiful city – I can gaze upon the beauty of David every day – but it seems to have a dark heart. The two churches (Methodist and Waldensian) in Florence have a history of arguments and while many members want to overcome this, others are content to hang on to past hurts, making it difficult but not impossible, to progress to a happier future. Perhaps this is related to the famed Florentine hard-headedness? At the union of the two churches, Florence Methodist was one of the communities that voted against, although again I understand this is typical of the national character as even the unification of the country was agreed by a small majority!

I am also still puzzled by the lack of the word ‘steward’ in the Italian language but perhaps this also explains why it is difficult to create a sense of shared responsibility for the life of the church, plus the fact that Italian 10.30 a.m. means ‘up to 15 minutes late is acceptable’, which for the English can be hard to accept! On the very positive side, in the last few months we have been able to return the Sunday school to Sunday mornings during the service, thanks to one church member volunteering to lead the class, appoint a new treasurer, relieving someone of a responsibility borne for at least 20 years, and find representatives to the annual Methodist Consultation. Slowly, Florence Methodist is showing that it just might be able to return to standing on its own feet. I guess that it not a bad result after 28 months’ work.

The biggest challenge facing the churches here is the same across all Europe – how to share our faith in words and ways that make sense today. We are beginning to realise that we cannot rely on the Protestant birth-rate, nor on disillusioned Catholics. Instead, we need to rediscover the passion and the words for faith-sharing. The words of Beckwith are still pertinent: ‘*Voi sarete missionari o non sarete nulla*’ [You will be missionaries or you will be nothing]. I could be facing that challenge in five churches in the UK, or one here in Italy. Just for now, I think I’ll stay and work on it within eyesight of the Ponte Vecchio.

Book review

Sergio Velluto: *Il Pretesto*, Claudiana, Torino, pp307, €14.90.

Anyone approaching the Waldensians’ history for the first time is always astonished that, despite the abundance of material and the great possibilities offered by 850 proven years and many more shrouded in mystery, it has so far generated effectively only serious volumes of ‘real’ history. This is odd, since it could fit any genre from thriller to crime to spy to fiction to historical novel ... not to mention cinema or TV. Now someone has produced a fictional work in ‘da Vinci Code’ style with a fundamental difference: characters and 21st-century

murders apart, the whole tale is based on historical facts which happened over the centuries and the 'Waldensian codes' which are the main source of inspiration for the book really exist. I've seen them at the University Library in Cambridge: they are small or even minute manuscripts written in Occitan between the 14th and 15th centuries and originally hidden in the *College of the Barba*, the Medieval secret College of Theology of Pra del Torno in the wooded hills of Val d'Angrogna. Here the *barba* (meaning uncle or older person) would spend the winter memorising long passages of the Gospels so that, during the summer season, disguised as merchants, two by two they would preach in the whole of Europe from the Baltic to Sicily, like their founding father Waldo defying the Papal prohibition on preaching in the vernacular without having been first ordained. With the refinement of the Inquisitorial techniques and with the various waves of persecutions these precious manuscripts were mostly burnt and the few left were many times stolen or lost. After many vicissitudes – verging on the unbelievable – throughout the centuries they reached safety in Cambridge University Library, at Trinity College Dublin and in Geneva. These are the facts. True also has been the project – so far twice unsuccessful – of putting all of them together in an exhibition at the State Archive of Turin.

I have always found it incredible that, in the middle of massacres, fire and pillage, someone would risk their life in order to rescue some booklets, no matter how precious. Now Sergio Velluto, a Waldensian from Apulia living in Turin, has not just refused to accept answers that are too easy and in a way reductive but has built a plausible, all-too believable entanglement of interests, plots and intrigue. This takes us on a complex journey in time (2009, 15th and 17th centuries) and places (Turin, North Carolina, Waldensian Valleys, Lyon). On the way he makes us rediscover in a curious way the history of the Waldensians and of the manuscripts, while throwing us into the dungeons of modern mysterious Turin and the secret life of some of its inhabitants. It is known that Turin, with its four rivers and magnetism, is one of the three cities of the 'magic triangle'. What is less known is that, along with the other cities of Prague and Lyon, it also shares the 'Waldensian circle'.

When Professor Gloria, curator of the Exhibition, is struck on the head while opening the safe and the most precious of the manuscripts disappears, shadows and suspicions from the near and distant past re-emerge to become seriously threatening while people begin to be killed. The Archivist from Torre Pellice, the black SUV, the corrupt linguist, later repentant, the Professor from Lyons, the journalist from Turin, the research student from Salem, various medieval *barbas* and their descendants, all intertwine and chase each other, either trying to escape the killers or looking for the documents – and in the end for the Truth, even if all at cross-purposes. As one would expect, there is no lack of high prelates from the Vatican, who are however not, as one might expect, in pursuit of the 'heretics', nor of their precious 'holy loot'.

Worth reading and maybe ... translating?

ES

**WALDENSIAN CHURCH MISSIONS, VAUDOIS PASTORS FUND
& CANON ARMSTRONG BEQUEST - SUMMARY ACCOUNTS**

INCOME	2010		2011	
Churches	820.51		1422.88	
Individual Donations	972.50		1614.50	
Loan	500.00			
Legacy			2000.00	
Tax Refund	190.39		177.70	
AGM			100.00	
		2483.40		5315.08
Vaudois Clergy Trust	1317.21		1420.00	
Publications	408.96		262.50	
Dividend & Interest	3493.91		3670.45	
		<u>5220.08</u>		<u>5352.95</u>
TOTAL		<u>7703.48</u>		<u>10668.03</u>
 EXPENDITURE				
Payments to Italy				
Student	6253.46		2669.86	
Sicily Training Course			500.00	
		6253.46		3169.86
Review	428.00		580.29	
Sec/Post/Stationery	2349.01		2617.52	
Publications			705.58	
Sundries	90.35		44.00	
Loan Repayment			500.00	
		<u>2867.36</u>		<u>4447.37</u>
TOTAL		<u>9120.82</u>		<u>7617.23</u>
 NET EXPEND/INCOME		 -1417.34		 3050.80
Opening Bank Balance	3620.39		2203.05	
Income	7703.48		10668.03	
Expenditure	<u>-9120.82</u>		<u>-7617.23</u>	
Closing Bank Balance	2203.05		5235.85	

NOTES

Total Income - £2000 uinder churches & donations specifically to fund student

Loan Repayment - 2010 loan repaid by conversion to donation

Review/postage - higher sum due to 2 editions of Review in 2011 compared to 1 in 2010

Publications - 2011 sum covers payment for 2 year's calendars

Government gives to Waldenses

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.

Since 5 April 2000 the new Gift Aid scheme has replaced Deeds of Covenant and the process is much simpler. This applies to all donations of any size or frequency. Thus a gift of only £1 made once will be increased by 28% as will a monthly donation of £100.

All that is required is for the donor to complete a simple declaration in the form given below and to forward this to the Treasurer whose address is on the inside of the back page. Once this form has been completed it covers all future donations by the same person. Unlike Deeds of Covenant, you are not committed to regular giving for a number of years.

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.



WALDENSIAN CHURCH MISSIONS

Registered Charity No. 277255

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Signature of donor Date

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

Patron: The Lord Leslie Griffiths, Wesley Chapel, 49 City Road, London EC1Y 1AU.

Chairman: The Rev. Richard Grocott, 23 Burcote Road, London SW18 3LQ.

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 marklynnne5@btinternet.com

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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