

**“From the movement to church.
The Waldensian and the reformation through Europe and Italy along the centuries”**

The Waldensian movement was born in about 1070 in Lyon, in the Middle Ages, under the thrust to the reform of the church that animated the people in that period.

The movement spread from the south of France to Italy, before in the north and after to the south. It moved from Lyon to Bergamo, from Provence, in south of France, to Guardia Piemontese in Calabria (south Italy), from the Waldensian Valleys, in Piedmont (north west of Italy), to Venice (north east of Italy).

And then the movement arrived in Austria, Germany, Poland, Czech. (Map of the Waldensian diffusion in Europe)

This movement was persecuted and hid themselves for centuries.

But it resisted and its preachers, the "Barba", went through Europe with their "portions of the bible" in current language to meet people.

They meet also, in XV century, in Bohemia, the Hussite theologians that give to the Waldensian movement a more structured theology.

In XVI century the Waldensian movement meet the ideas of reformation that arrived from Germany and Switzerland. The Waldensians in 1526 decided to send two "Barba" to Basel and to Strasbourg with some question for the reformation movement. (Map of the travel of the two Barba)

They said to the reformation: "we are here; for centuries we have said that the people have to read the bible, that there are not intermediaries, that every one must have the bread and the vine of the Eucharist service and so on. What is different in your propose?".

The reformers Ecolampadio and Bucer said them that "we are saved by grace" but also that the Waldensian movement are the precursor of the movement of reformation that spread across Europe.

In 1532 the Waldensian movement, gathered at Chanforan in the Waldensian Valleys, join to the Reform. With this decision the movement began a Church and new persecutions began. (photo of Chanforan)

In 1545 in Provence the community were exterminated and the same thing happened in Guardia Piemontese in 1561. In the same years also in Piedmont began the persecution but the Waldensians fight and resist. The persecution continued through XVII century just to, after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685, the imprisonment of all the Waldensians (12.000 persons) and the deportation of survivors (2.700 persons) from Piedmont to Geneva in 1687. In 1689 the Waldensians return in their valley in arms to regain their lands and their right to exist (Glorioso rimpatrio). (Map of the exil and of the Glorioso rimpatrio)

They win but for more than another century they don't have the possibility to move outside of the border of the Waldensian Valleys (was built a sort of "Waldensian Ghetto") and can't have any civil right. (map of the Waldensian Valleys)

Only in 1848 the king Carlo Alberto of Savoia give to Waldensians the civil freedom and they can go outside of the Valleys. The time were change and they, and other congregation, went through Italy to speak of the gospel, and the reformation movement spread from Torino to Rome, from Milano to Palermo, from Florence to Naples. (Map of Italy with the Waldensian church in 1900)

Today the Waldensian church is a minority church in Italy and in Rio de la Plata on the other side of the ocean; it is a Presbyterian church that have relationships with the Italian State with wich have a good collaboration for example in term of social service and in the field of cultural activity.

“The movement has began a Church”, its development in passed trough Europe and it is arrived in Nord and South America.

The Waldensians from 1848 have founded in Italy, in South America, and wherever they went, schools and social services; they have participated at the peace and ecumenical movement; they have tried to develop their principles of democracy that is practiced in the church just from the real beginning; in Chanforan, were was the Sinod, the general assembly not only of the “Barba” but also of the heads of family, that decided to joint the Waldensian movement to the reformation movement that arrived from Germany and Switzerland. A tradition that arrived at Waldensians from centuries of fight for freedom of conscience.

Dott. Davide Rosso

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At the moment he is director of the Waldensian cultural center foundation, the national organization of the Waldensian church that manage the Waldensian library, the historical waldensian archives and the historical and ethnographic Waldensian museum and has for statutory purposes that of safeguards, enhancing and promote the history and the heritages of the movement and of the Waldensian church.

Rosso have published in Italy and abroad several books and articles that have as theme the Waldensian history and the diaconal services (here some titles of his publications: “Compartir benditiones, esperienza di viaggio nella diaconia valdese rio platense”, Alzani 2009, “Responding to the Challenge. The Search for Hope in the Mediterranean”, in Diaconia 2016 Vol. 7, Issue 1, Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice, “La Grande Guerra: storie e memorie valdesi”, Lareditore 2014, “Sui sentieri dei valdesi”, Ed. Capricorno 2015; “Les chemins des Vaudois: l’exil”, Fondation Centre culturel Vaudois, 2017).