



# THE WALDENSIAN REVIEW



LE VALLI VALDESI

2013

*Paolo Paschetto (1885-1963)*

No. 121

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## FROM the EDITOR

Dear Friends and Supporters,

After 2 Christmas issues as a 4-page 'money-saving' newsletter, this year we have opted for a 'traditional' 16-page printed version once again, since too much material had accumulated. I cannot foresee what will happen in the future, it very much depends on your response to the **website** and on our financial situation. Meanwhile let's enjoy catching up with what has been waiting to reach you for a while.

The October Away Day was successful. We had two excellent speakers and a very welcoming and comfortable new venue in Hinde Street Methodist Church. New people came and **our website** <[www.waldensian.org.uk](http://www.waldensian.org.uk)> was officially launched. Professor Sir Colin Humphreys talked about *Science and the Truth of the Gospels: what really happened at Easter* and you will be able to read more about this in the 2013 report. Peter Meadows, well known to our readers, commemorated the 150th anniversary of the death of Charles Beckwith in 1862. Richard Newbury, who was our delegate, reported on the Synod and Mark Stephens gave us an account of our finances. It was also the day when Dr Ian Nimmo-Smith, ex-leader of Cambridge City Council and Mayor until May 2012, joined the Committee as a trustee of the Waldensian Church Mission.

As regards funding projects in Italy, we have once again helped the *Bible studies* and *Confirmation classes for the youth groups in Sicily* who hold long weekend gatherings together two or three times a year, in order to meet, learn, discuss, pray, explore their faith and grow together with the help of their youth leaders and pastors.

We are also extending an invitation from the Tavola Valdese to anyone willing to contribute towards the *collection for the repairs to the Waldensian church and the minister's apartment of Felonica Po (Lombardy) which has been badly damaged by the two earthquakes that destroyed large areas in the northeastern regions of Italy. You can send your donations to our Treasurer.*

Our **main future expense**, though, is going to be for the 'year abroad' of another *Italian Methodist student* who will train, with God's help, at Wesley House, Cambridge, in the academic year 2013–14. Since there are no longer grants from churches or colleges, the cost is going to be considerable and **everyone is invited to send a contribution** towards this essential training of future pastors in Italy. I never tire of underlining the importance of this experience of a totally different culture and history, and indeed of preparing for the ministry. Now, more than ever, this is crucial, given the presence throughout Italy of so many Christians from Africa and from Churches connected to British history and heritage. **Your help is vital!**

For the training of Luca Ghiretti at Wesley House in the academic year 2010–11, we received funds from other British Committees: the **Scottish Wal-**

*Cover photo: From the 2013 calendar. Paolo Paschetto: Donne al culto (women in traditional Waldensian costume going to church).*

**densian Mission Aid Society** and the **URC Waldensian Fellowship**. This joining forces for a common goal was to me a great encouragement and a demonstration of real fellowship. Let's hope this co-operation will continue in the future!

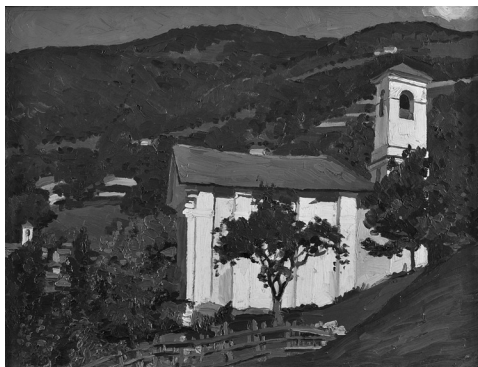
*Please don't forget to let me know your new address if you move! Friends from outside Europe: please check if you can find us online and are happy to read and follow us this way!*

ESN, Editor

## CALENDARS 2013

As you may have guessed I am absolutely passionate about this special edition commemorating the artist and committed believer **Paolo Paschetto** (1885–1963) with the story of his fruitful life on the reverse pages and splendid reproductions of oil paintings portraying his beloved Waldensian Valleys.

Paolo Paschetto, who was born in Torre Pellice, grew up in Rome and became best known as a painter and engraver, but he was also active in the illustration of books and in interior decoration and produced splendid stained-glass windows in various churches in Rome, such as the Waldensian church of piazza Cavour and the Baptist church. He also designed stamps and, notably, the emblem of the Italian Republic. **HENCE: do buy the calendars!** Since Milvia has already sold all her copies please send your orders **£10.50 each** p&p included (cheques payable to Waldensian Church Mission) to Erica S. Newbury: 85 St Andrew's Road, Cambridge CB4 1DH. **HURRY! You don't want to miss this unique opportunity!**



*May*



*August*

## FROM the CHAIRMAN

Dear Friends,

I wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year. I hope and pray that the year 2013 will be peaceful and blessed for you all and once again you will draw comfort and strength from the Christ child in the Bethlehem manger who was born to bring light and life to our world.

It was such a joy to see so many of you turn up to Hinde Street Methodist Church in mid October for our Away Day. It was lovely to meet up with old friends again but also encouraging to welcome a good number of new faces as well. I am sure everyone would agree that it was a splendid day, our speakers were most interesting and stimulating and there was a real buzz of enthusiasm in our AGM as we planned for the future of our beloved Waldensian Mission and as we heard encouraging words on the work of the Waldensian Church. I hope you find this issue to be an informative good read. I encourage you to buy our wonderful calendars, to visit our new web page and to pray for the Committee members who next meet on Saturday 2 March 2013.

*Yours sincerely  
Richard Grocott*

### Leslie Griffiths

(As promised, a short portrait of our new Patron)

The first time I heard Leslie Griffiths preaching, in the early 1990s, I was ecstatic. Listening to him on radio and TV programmes reinforced my opinion. Years later I invited him to talk on the 350th anniversary of the 1655 Massacre of the Slaughtered Saints, as remembered by Milton. In 50 minutes, without a note, Leslie offered us a remarkable excursus into the 800 years of Waldensian history, adding his personal experience of when as a child he had learnt the sonnet without the faintest idea of what it was about, to end with the conclusion that the Waldensians had always dared to take the right decisions even

### AWAYDAY 2013

**Saturday 12 October 2013**  
**Hinde Street Methodist Church**  
19 Thayer Street, London W1U 2QJ

**Programme to be announced in the Spring issue**

when difficult and uncertain. From the Synod of Chanforan (when they chose to become part of the Reformation) in 1532 to the unification with the Methodists, the Lord had always proved them right. And as far as his own experience as a boy is concerned, it is always worth learning difficult things, from arcane poems to hymns or Biblical passages, because sooner or later they will make sense; making everything too easy or simplified for our youth is a mistake.

Two degrees (Cardiff, English Literature; Cambridge, Theology) a PhD (SOAS), ex-President of the Methodist Conference, *Superintendent* of Wesley Chapel, honorary Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, and member of the House of Lords, he is one of the best known Methodists in the world. His origins, though, could not be more humble and this is his Dickensian story.

Leslie Griffiths was born in 1942 in the Welsh village of Burry Port and the financial situation of the family worsened after the divorce of his parents. With his brother, he experienced a childhood of misery and poverty in which the only redemption, for him and other children, came from school and Sunday school. The good women who treated those urchins with tough love and discipline gave them an invaluable tool and later, when Leslie was admitted to the local Grammar school, they provided him with the most stringent necessities. Leslie Griffiths is very keen on that great institution that has produced legions of intellectuals and politicians from the lower classes who otherwise would not have had access to higher education, and that, thank goodness, the levelling utopias of politicians and educators (invariably from a privileged background) have not managed entirely to dismantle. He went on to study at Cardiff University, where he found himself irresistibly attracted to the Methodist church. After some University teaching, he went to Cambridge to read Theology. Meanwhile he had met and married Margaret, from a Methodist family going back to Wesley's days.

In 1970–74 they volunteered as missionaries and ended up in the Haiti of Papa Doc and his infamous *Tonton Macoute*. The situation was unbelievably difficult: 48 'parishes' to look after, most of them reachable only after long journeys by Land Rover or mule or boat ... this was Leslie's life. Margaret, on the other hand, had one hour and a half of gas and water a day, nobody to really talk to in a language she knew, and yet she still dared to have the first two children there. To make things worse, the minister in charge died shortly after their arrival and the 'apprentice' minister was left to fend for himself surrounded by terrifying police, illnesses, voodoo rites and natural catastrophes.

The day of his consecration at Port-au-Prince in 1973 during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, and admiring that Christian rainbow – RC, CoE, Salvation Army, Baptists, Pentecostals, independents – he decided to dedicate his life to fight for real unity.

After a three-year interval at Reading, during which their daughter was born, the Griffiths were back in Haiti; not an easy choice, not least because they had three children under 5! This time he set himself some realistic goals

and once they had been attained they would go back: there is a limit to what, even with the best intentions, one can do in a place with so many needs and problems. He undertook a lot of material work as well as spiritual, and his nickname was *concrete minister*, the Bible in one hand and the trowel in the other ... He would go back to Haiti more times, and particularly when his friend Jean-Bertrand Aristide, priest and Theologian of Liberation, was elected President at the end of the 1990s.

Back in the UK he was in charge of various churches and from 1987 for 17 years he would be a regular contributor to *Thought for the Day* on BBC Radio 4. He soon became one of the best known and followed voices also in other programmes. In 1994–95 he was elected President of the Methodist Conference. In that role he met the Queen, who asked him what his duties consisted of. He explained, Her Majesty listened carefully and then said: ‘It looks very similar to my job. One day we should exchange notes ...’

One year after the end of his mandate came the invitation to be Superintendent of Wesley Chapel and he became the 59th successor to John Wesley. From here he often expands to the rest of the ‘parish’, the world, as in the famous Wesleyan saying.

In 2000 the Bishop of London invited him to become Hon Canon of St Paul’s Cathedral, where he is active as a preacher and speaker, and then the last extraordinary challenge: in 2004 he was offered a place as a ‘working Peer’ in the House of Lords, becoming Baron Griffiths of Burry Port. We are very honoured that he has accepted, after Prescot Stephens’s death, to become our Patron.

ESN

## **Alastair and Rachel Morris** (guest speakers at the 2011 AGM)

I first met Alastair and Rachel at Wesley Church, Cambridge, when they were part of MethSoc. Rachel was reading History and AI, Engineering. Just before they graduated, in 2002, the church organised an auction of promises and over a cup of tea I persuaded them that, since they wanted to do some voluntary work but had no idea yet where, I knew exactly where they could go. I rang Alessandra Trotta, who is now the equivalent of the President of the Methodist Conference in Italy and was then in charge of La Noce, a multiple-function Social centre in the slums of Palermo (Sicily). Within a few weeks, the two had been sent with other foreign volunteers to Torre Pellice to learn Italian and something about the Waldensian history and church today, and soon they moved to Palermo. In 2002–03 they spent nearly a year working in La Noce, Rachel teaching English and helping in the primary school, and Alastair being a father-figure in the foster home for small children waiting to be adopted. Italy obviously left a mark as, after marrying in 2005, they hap-





*Alastair and Rachel on their last day in Turin.*

pily went to Turin, where Alastair worked for Bosch and both were part of the Waldensian Church of Corso Vittorio, attending the main church and the 'English-speaking' community in 2007–10.

The English church (where they actually were the only English people, the congregation being composed of Christians from all over the world, America, Australia, Africa ...) had no minister when they arrived and this helped to build a great sense of community. Later on a retired minister from Scotland and his wife, the Cairns, arrived and their enthusiasm and energy were incredibly inspiring. Al and Rachel joined a choir and became friends with young Waldensians, including the young pastor of the church of Corso Principe Oddone. They also did social work with the centre for migrants organised by the Church that every Friday provided help to at least 100 people, from food to advice, to learning Italian, to integration.

They found Turin very beautiful and more welcoming than they expected and after three years they think they have now grasped its reality, culture, attitude.

As far as the Waldensian–Methodist church is concerned, they appreciate their concern in trying to be different from the RC church, but in their opinion their quest for *laicità* (the opposite of clericalism) risks making them too confrontational and prone to secularism. The best way to be different would be to be true to the Gospel and show an alternative way of believing and preaching. Back in Britain, Alastair and Rachel are now both welcome members of our Committee.

ES

## The Waldensian Methodist Synod, Torre Pellice 2012

The Waldensian Methodist Synod this year in Torre Pellice marked the end of Maria Bonafede's seven-year mandate, the first woman Moderator since women were first ordained in 1962. Eliana Briante, the Minister of the Methodist Church in Milan, gave the Opening Sermon on the text from St Paul's command to the crippled beggar at the Temple door: 'Of gold and silver have I none, but what I have I will give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk.'



*The outgoing Moderator, Maria Bonafede, receiving a Huguenot cross made with walnut wood as a thank you for her seven intense and fruitful years of hard work.*

Reminding us that her church had 20 nationalities in the congregation, Rev Briante drew three conclusions which set the themes of this Synod in an Italy rent by economic crisis. Firstly, outreach should not be just seen as hand-outs, but as human contacts. Secondly, help should be as a community. Peter was accompanied by Luke; Peter on his own was always a disaster. Thirdly, praise: healing becomes salvation which needs to be communicated. The wind



*The new Moderator, Eugenio Bernardini, in the centre with members of the Tavola, the Board.*

blows where it will. Learn from overseas the joy of faith.

The newly elected Moderator, Pastor Eugenio Bernardini, after a Synod that showed itself prepared to face up the difficulties presented by the crisis for the church and the wider community, concluded on a similar theme. The church needed a union of improving past prac-



tices but also of creating a new way of living; one which makes full use of the opportunities of the new digital interconnectivity, while not forgetting that identity and culture provided a pathway out of the crisis. Being a gathered church now presented the challenge and opportunity of mutual comprehension with new immigrant members. It also meant inter-generational solidarity; while Maria Bonafede had been a living witness for the mutual contribution of men and women.

The crisis creates both desperate needs and rising costs for an ever increasing outreach. It also reduces the capacity of members to pay their contributions. At the same time, Regional Government responsible for Social Services often fails to pay for services contracted out to the Waldensian Church. La Noce, which is the only emergency children's home in Palermo, is a notable example. The Police bring children at risk in the middle of the night, but La Noce is also in the dark as to when they will be paid, if at all, by the Local Authority.

The 8 euros in every 1000 of income tax that Italians can direct to the Waldensian Church sees 400,000 Italians donating 12 million euros, which the Synod has always voted should be only for outreach [with a published list] and not for maintaining clergy and church buildings. Church contributions at €2.2 million cover 88% of manpower and church maintenance. There is a



*End of Synod communion.*

€300,000 shortfall. However, to balance the books in 2015, Synod had decided to increase parish giving by 10% and to reduce expenditure by 3%.

Monsignor Gino Battaglia, the Vatican's ecumenical observer, declared himself impressed by 'The Synod with its simplicity and profundity but also in its concreteness which made one think of how things must have been in the assemblies of the first Christian churches'.

RN

## Willy Jourdan

I've known Willy since he was a sixth-former at Collegio Valdese, I know his parents and his Professors at the Faculty of Theology in Rome, therefore I was really delighted to be able to attend his ordination. Willy, who has always



Willy Jourdan. (Photo: Pietro Romeo) .

been a very diligent student and who has been greatly appreciated by the churches where he has done his probationary years, was ordained while still under 30, which is unusual in Italy. Even more unusual is to be already married (his German wife has been an ordained minister for a while) and have two children.

They are in charge of two communities in the Veneto Region.



ES

*The continuation of Ian Thomson's talk on Primo Levi will appear next time*

## Charles Beckwith

150 years ago Major-General John Charles Beckwith was buried in the cemetery of Torre Pellice, the Waldensian capital. He was 72. He was survived by his wife, Caroline, whom he had married in 1850 when aged 60, and by his only child, Charlotte, who was born six months after his death. Thousands of Waldensians accompanied his coffin and contributed to the cost of his monument. How had Beckwith, born in Halifax, Nova Scotia, who had campaigned through Spain and France in the Napoleonic Wars, fought at the Battle of Waterloo and lost a leg, come to be so honoured in Torre Pellice at his death in 1862?

Having semi-retired from the Army in 1820, as a Lieutenant-Colonel on half-pay, aged just 30, Beckwith needed a new cause into which to channel his formidable military organisational skills. He remained on good terms with his commander-in-chief, the Duke of Wellington, and in 1827, before an interview with the Duke at Apsley House, he picked up William Gilly's account of his visit to the Waldensian valleys, published in 1823. Gilly, a clergyman, publicised the plight of the Waldensians, downtrodden Protestants in Catholic Piedmont. The book's success had encouraged Gilly



*Charles Beckwith.*

to help found the English Committee in 1825. Beckwith was so inspired by it that he immediately bought his own copy and visited Piedmont the same year, saw the squalor and lack of education of the Waldensians, and decided to settle among them and devote his life to assisting them.

There might have been another reason for his moving to Italy. It is likely that Beckwith was in receipt of British secret service money, for acting as an informal diplomat and a spy. Quite possibly Wellington and others saw the advantage of having this talented man able to report on the government in Turin without attracting too much attention. His lifestyle could not have been maintained on his half-pay alone. Nor could his military promotion (Colonel 1837, Major-General 1846) have been rewards for his work for the Waldensians alone.

According to his biographer, Jean-Pierre Meille, writing in 1872, Beckwith spent his time between 1820 and 1827 in self-improvement and study, and spent several years in the United States, investigating its development. According to Meille, Beckwith was a late developer physically, very short in stature until he was 18, but then growing rapidly until at 25 he was tall and handsome, even with the loss of a leg at 26. It is unclear why he did not marry until he was 60, and fathered his first child just three months before his death aged 72.

Meille gives a summary of Beckwith's life among the Waldensians. His first visit was in autumn 1827, but he stayed only three or four days on account of bad weather. He returned every year in October, and generally stayed until the following May. In spring 1833 he was taken seriously ill, and returned to England until autumn 1834. He was again in the valleys from 1834 to spring 1839, then in London until 1841. He was again in the Valleys from 1841 to 1851, when he moved to Turin. He moved to Paris in 1856 and Calais in 1859, and finally returned to the Valleys in 1861, dying at Torre Pellice on 19th July 1862. Meille's chapter headings show the range and scale of his work: primary education, secondary instruction, churches and parsonages, works of charity, ecclesiastical questions, evangelisation of Italy, writer and editor.

One of Beckwith's chief concerns was to educate the Waldensians. There were many primitive hamlet schools operating in winter only, often in barns



*The restored tomb of Charles Beckwith in Torre Pellice.*

or stables, the master poorly paid and scarcely educated himself, and lacking books and equipment. In a few years in the 1830s, from Beckwith's design, with his money and under his supervision, over 100 hamlet schools were built and equipped. Afterwards, Beckwith regularly inspected them.

Larger villages had schools which operated for up to 10 months a year, but many of them were dilapidated and lacked resources. Beckwith repaired them and provided new furniture and equipment. At secondary level there was a Latin school, funded by Dutch benefactors, where the children learnt enough Latin and Greek to be able to attend university in Lausanne, Geneva or Strasbourg. With the founding of the College of the Holy Spirit in Torre Pellice in 1831, such teaching began to be made in the Valleys. The college was William Gilly's great benefaction to the Waldensians. Its purpose was to train students for the ministry, teaching and the professions, without the need for them to study abroad. The handsome building, completed in 1837, was designed by Beckwith and built under his supervision.

Beckwith next turned his attention to the state of the Waldensian churches. Many were in a dilapidated and neglected state, particularly those at Rodoretto and Rora. Between 1843 and 1846 Beckwith rebuilt both churches, as well as the parsonage at Rodoretto.

Beckwith also built a parsonage for Prali, and houses for the College professors and a church in Torre Pellice. Although it was the Waldensian capital, Torre had always been forbidden by government edict to hold evangelical worship in the town. In the 1840s, 2300 out of 3300 inhabitants were Waldensians, the rest Roman Catholic. In 1847 the approach of emancipation prompted Beckwith to plan a large, impressive church just outside the town's boundaries, almost opposite the College. William Gilly asked his Durham friend the architect Ignatius Bonomi for designs, though Beckwith and his builder Gastaldi slightly modified them in execution. The Torre church was begun in 1849 and finished in 1852.

In 1851 Beckwith moved to the Piedmontese capital, Turin, to promote the evangelisation of Italy. Until 1848 evangelical worship was absolutely forbidden in the capital except in foreign embassy chapels. Beckwith wanted a Waldensian church in Turin to be a bold statement that reformed religion was on the move in emancipated Piedmont. It was important that such a building should be architecturally impressive. Beckwith designed it in conjunction with the architect Luigi Formento. The foundation stone was laid in 1851, and the church was opened in 1853.

One bar to evangelisation was the language issue. The Waldensians spoke a form of Provençal, with many variations from valley to valley. Their language of instruction and worship was French; the national language was Italian. In the 1830s and 40s Beckwith tried several experiments to improve access to education, first by publishing New Testaments translated into Waldensian, which by and large failed, because of the variations in dialect, and then by providing Bibles in French with parallel Italian texts. When emancipation came

in 1848, Beckwith saw that it was vital for expansion that the Waldensians should understand Italian. Few of the pastors spoke it well. At Beckwith's expense, four of the College professors were sent to Tuscany to learn Italian; and he organised intensive courses for schoolmasters, so that Italian might be taught in Waldensian schools.

Both Gilly and Beckwith hoped that the Waldensians would move from their synodical form of church government to something closer to Anglicanism, even perhaps to accepting bishops and the Book of Common Prayer. The Synod met every five years and elected the Moderator and 5-member Tavola. The Moderator was also a parish pastor. Beckwith thought this system inefficient. He felt it needed a permanent shepherd-figure, and he proposed that the Moderator should be appointed for life. When his idea was rejected in 1838, Beckwith, feeling that, with the help he and other British people had given, his ideas should bear greater weight, wrote to the Moderator in somewhat condescending tones: 'We understand your interests better than you ... and possess all that is needed to form a sensible judgment'.

Beckwith tried again after emancipation to persuade the Waldensians to reform their structure and their liturgy, in order to present, as he saw it, a confident, disciplined and doctrinally sound alternative to Roman Catholicism to the Italian people. Once again his suggestions were rejected. Coming soon after his crowning achievement, the opening of the Turin church, this hit Beckwith hard, and he concluded that he could do no more for the Waldensian church and people. He left Turin in 1856 and settled in France for several years. But despite his differences with the Waldensian church, something – perhaps his Waldensian wife – drew him back to Torre Pellice in 1861, to the love and affection and gratitude of the Waldensian people themselves.

*Peter Meadows*

## **Prescot Stephens (1918–2012)**

Prescot Stephens, who died earlier this year at the age of 94, was a vivid example of the great love that so many Britons during the centuries have felt and still feel nowadays for the Waldensians and the Waldensian Church. The order of service for the commemoration of his long and fruitful life bore, on the front page, the Waldensian symbol with the candle and the seven stars and above all the distinctive logo LUX LUCET IN TENEBRIS. One of the pictures showed Prescot as a little boy in the Waldensian Valleys during one of the many tours organised by his father, Captain Stephens. On the last page, the invitation to sustain in his memory the Waldensian Church Mission, the Society set up in 1825 by Canon Gilly – of whom I am the unworthy heir – that had General Beckwith as its 'local' agent and in which Prescot's family, through his aunt and his father (that Captain Stephens fondly remembered by so many Waldensians of the older generation), got involved from the end of the 19th century.



Prescot Stephens was born in 1918 in Ottawa and, like Beckwith, he belonged to a military family. His father, Richard Markham Stephens, was an officer of the Royal Navy 'lent' to Canada in 1909 in order to help build a Navy in preparation for a war that seemed more and more inevitable. The politicians talked and dithered and in the end it was this quiet man and strong believer who managed to make Canada ready for war. Captain Stephens, who had married the lively daughter of a Christian Jew, had been giving illustrated talks about the 'land of the Jews' – as Palestine was then known! – and which nobody in those days had ever visited. Captain Stephens was offered promotion to Flag Rank as an Admiral but, after his wife's miraculous recovery from an illness that was threatening to make him a widower, he decided to change his life. He retired from active service, went back to Britain and dedicated himself to the service of God and humankind. In 1926, with young Prescot, he paid the first of many visits to the Waldensian Valleys; later he would lead parties of English visitors on excursions that in the higher parts, where no roads existed, continued by mule. He was also from the beginning active in the rescue of Jews from Nazi Germany, and



*Peggy and Prescot Stephens at the Foresteria in Torre Pellice. (Photo: Nicky Raddon)*

when WWII started son and father were both involved in it. Prescot opted for the Meteorological Service of the RAF, thinking that in that way he might have fewer chances of killing other human beings. Sent to Italy, thanks to his previous contacts he managed to meet many Waldensians with whom he established cooperation, aid and long-lasting friendships.

The war over, Prescot married in 1945 and went to work for the bank of England. However, he never forgot his permanent love for the Waldensians, which he passed on to his wife Peggy and their three children. Having taken early retirement in 1973, he became even more involved in the Waldensian Mission. He joined the Committee in 1948 and has been a Trustee, Chairman, Vice-President



and President (he did not consider himself important enough to be called Patron). Not only did he take his father's place in organising group visits to the whole of Italy and fund-raising in order to support new projects, such as La Noce in Palermo, and establishing institutions such as hospitals, schools, children's homes ... but he also started the passionate research that culminated in the excellent *Waldensian Story*, a profoundly researched history in 374 pages covering the 12th to the beginning of the 21st century, and thus providing at last a story of the Waldensian people and Church for the Anglo-Saxon world with its particular cultural and religious background and presuppositions.

Generous, kind, with a gentle sense of humour, Prescott was the personification of English liberalism and Christian rectitude. His daughter, Joy, recalled how he taught her not to take advantage of public money even when she was entitled to – such as with the free school bus – and also how he never interfered when she chose to live as a missionary in Nepal and Tanzania. She also remembered how, after seeing the flat she wanted to share as a student in a run-down part of London, her mother broke into tears. Prescott took Peggy's arm and led her back to the car, saying 'My dear, if she wants to live in a slum, we should let her!' Joy ended by saying that she knows some women struggle with the image of God as 'Father' but she is not one of them, because hers gave her 'the most beautiful example of what being a good father means'.

I find it very meaningful that, shortly after Prescott's death, Joy felt drawn to go to Torre Pellice with her daughter, where they even climbed up to *Bars d'la Tagliola*, a seemingly impervious secret cliff-face hideout used as a refuge by the persecuted Waldensians.

I myself learnt only a while ago that some members of the Committee had resisted my taking the post of Executive Secretary after Bishop Ward's retirement, since I was a woman and a foreigner, and Prescott had vehemently supported me. I feel very grateful for this and hope that I have proved him right.

I am delighted that the publisher Claudiana has now decided to reprint *The Waldensian Story*, which has been out of print for years and is in great demand. I ask the Lord to give me the strength to continue Prescott's work and to see my Church as he did and to love it unconditionally, as he taught all of us to do.

Erica Scropo

## Book Review

Franco Giampiccoli: *J Charles Beckwith Il Generale dei valdesi (1789–1862)*,  
Claudiana 2012

An Anglican among the Waldensians, 'the Colonel with the wooden leg' as he was then known in the Valleys, Charles Beckwith is without doubt one of

the best known names in the long Waldensian *Risorgimento*, and it perhaps for that reason that his name is redolent with both myth and hagiography. There is a real need, therefore, for the publication by Claudiana on the 150th anniversary of Beckwith's death. However, the reader who is expecting a traditional biography of the General will be deluded.

Whilst the Introduction by Richard Newbury is certainly biographical, brilliantly presenting us with Beckwith the soldier and in his early years, Giampiccoli prefers to proceed through themes as he delineates the phases and stages of Beckwith's work in raising funds in Britain on behalf of the Waldensians, to enable the construction of the schools and churches he himself had conceived. It is this method that constitutes the peculiarity of this fleet-footed account, which permits us to enter into the history of individual institutions, from the Girls' Boarding School in Torre Pellice to the building of the new Temple in Turin's principal boulevard, to cite but two examples. In doing this, Giampiccoli makes use of two centuries of Waldensian studies as well as his own original documentary researches.

In the book there emerges a Beckwith in the round; a child of that *Age of Benevolence* fruit of the Tory Anglican Evangelical Revival, which, between the American and French Revolutions, had seen figures like William Wilberforce successfully campaigning for the abolition of the slave trade. Beckwith, who had joined the Army at 13, was a man of order and an officer to the core, indeed an Evangelical Anglican who sought to convince the Presbyterian Waldensians of the superior command structure of an episcopacy and of the greater recognisable appeal of the *Book of Common Prayer* to Italian converts.

Among many interesting passages Giampiccoli also shows, apart from Beckwith's great efforts to raise funds for what was then considered a direct descendent of the Early Apostolic Church, the many difficulties the Englishman had to face; among them a resistance to change and to his professional authoritarian manner in his attempts more effectively to organise a church, which was always, despite setbacks and disagreements, close to his heart. Giampiccoli also touches on the question of whether Beckwith was also keeping an eye on such a strategic crossing of the Alps on behalf of HMG – as indeed a retired staff officer would have done. Beckwith was a creative conservative, an indefatigable fundraiser for the Waldensian Valleys in a tradition of British support going back to Cromwell, the holder of a faith founded in solid piety and one with the gift of a clear-sighted vision. This a book which helps us to understand how, cajoled by Beckwith's injunction in 1848 'either you evangelise or you are nothing', a little church has spread out from the Valleys into the whole Italian peninsula; to be what it is, or aspires to be, today.

Simone Maghenzani

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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 25%, providing you are a tax-payer.

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### WALDENSIAN CHURCH MISSIONS

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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

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

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

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

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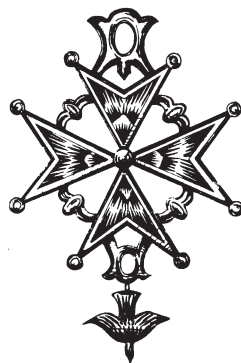
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