

CHAPTER 16 : TWO WITNESSES IN THE WILDERNESS

In Revelation 11 we read: "And there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein. But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty [and] two months. And I will give [power] unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred [and] threescore days, clothed in sackcloth. These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth." And in Revelation 12 we read: "the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred [and] threescore days." These passages foretell the rough estate of Christendom in the 1,260 years (according to the year-day principle) following the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD by the Gentiles. Yet these passages also relate the "two witnesses" which yet seek to uphold the truth of God's word during these 'wilderness years'. The witnesses are described as candlesticks, because candlesticks yet emit gospel light. (As we read in Revelation 1:20: "the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.") At no time did God leave the world without Christian witness, nor will He ever. When one body of confessors yielded to the darkness, or was cut off by violence, another arose in some other land, so that there was no age in which, in some country or other of Christendom, public testimony was not borne against the errors of Rome, and in behalf of the gospel which she too often sought to suppress.

The country in which we find some of the earliest of these Protesters is Italy. The See of Rome, in those days, embraced only the capital and the surrounding provinces. The diocese of Milan, which included the plain of Lombardy, the Alps of Piedmont, and the southern provinces of France, greatly exceeded it in extent. It is an undoubted historical fact that this powerful diocese was not then tributary to the Papal chair. "The Bishops of Milan," says Pope Pelagius I (555), "do not come to Rome for ordination." He further informs us that this "was an ancient custom of theirs." Pope Pelagius, however, attempted to subvert this "ancient custom," but his efforts resulted only in a wider estrangement between the two dioceses of Milan and Rome. For when Platina speaks of the subjection of Milan to the Pope under Stephen IX in the middle of the eleventh century, he admits that "for 200 years together the Church of Milan had been separated from the Church of Rome." Even then, though on the very eve of the Hildebrandine era, the destruction of the independence of the diocese was not accomplished without a protest on the part of its clergy, and a tumult on the part of the people. The former affirmed that "the Ambrosian Church was not subject to the laws of Rome; that it had been always free, and could not, with honor, surrender its liberties." The latter broke out into clamor, and threatened violence to Damianus, the deputy sent to receive their submission. "The people grew into higher ferment," says Baronius; "the bells were rung; the episcopal palace beset; and the legate threatened with death." Traces of its early independence remain to this day in the Rito or Culto Ambrogiano, still in use throughout the whole of the ancient Archbishopric of Milan.

One consequence of this ecclesiastical independence of Northern Italy was, that the

corruptions of which Rome was the source were late in being introduced into Milan and its diocese. The evangelical light shone there some centuries after the darkness had gathered in the southern part of the peninsula. Ambrose, who died A.D. 397, was Bishop of Milan for twenty-three years. His theology, and that of his diocese, was quite similar to that of the Protestants of a later day. The Bible alone was his rule of faith; Christ alone was the foundation of the church; the justification of the sinner and the remission of sins were not of human merit, but by the expiatory sacrifice of the Cross; there were but two sacraments, Baptism and the Lord's Supper, and in the latter Christ was held to be present only figuratively. Such is a summary of the faith professed and taught by the chief bishop of the north of Italy in the end of the fourth century.

Rufinus, of Aquileia, first metropolitan in the diocese of Milan, taught substantially the same doctrine in the fifth century. His treatise on the Creed no more agrees with the catechism of the Council of Trent than does the catechism of Protestants. His successors at Aquileia, so far as can be gathered from the writings which they have left behind them, shared the sentiments of Rufinus.

To come to the sixth century, we find Laurentius, Bishop of Milan, holding that the penitence of the heart, without the absolution of a priest, suffices for pardon; and in the end of the same century (A.D. 590) we find the bishops of Italy and of the Grisons, to the number of nine, rejecting the communion of the Pope, as a heretic, so little then was the infallibility believed in, or the Roman supremacy acknowledged. In the seventh century we find Mansuetus, Bishop of Milan, declaring that the whole faith of the Church is contained in the Apostles' Creed; from which it is evident that he did not regard as necessary to salvation the additions which Rome had then begun to make, and the many she has since appended to the Apostolic doctrine. The Ambrosian Liturgy, which, as we have said, continues to be used in the diocese of Milan, is a monument to the comparative purity of the faith and worship of the early Churches of Lombardy.

In the eighth century we find Paulinus, Bishop of Aquileia, declaring that "we feed upon the divine nature of Jesus Christ, which cannot be said but only with respect to believers, and must be understood metaphorically." Thus, it is manifest that he rejected the corporeal manducation of the Church at Rome. He also warns men against approaching God through any other mediator or advocate than Jesus Christ, affirming that He alone was conceived without sin; that He is the only Redeemer, and that He is the one foundation of the Church. "If any one," says Allix, "will take the pains to examine the opinions of this bishop, he will find it a hard thing not to take notice that he denies what the Church of Rome affirms with relation to all these articles, and that he affirms what the Church of Rome denies."

It must be acknowledged that these men, despite their great talents and their ardent piety, had not entirely escaped the degeneracy of their age. The light that was in them was partly mixed with darkness. Even the great Ambrose was touched with a veneration for relics, and a weakness for other superstitions of his times. But as regards the cardinal doctrines of salvation, the faith of these men was essentially Protestant, and stood out in bold antagonism to the leading principles of the Roman creed. And such, with more or

less of clearness, must be held to have been the profession of the pastors over whom they presided. And the Churches they ruled and taught were numerous and widely planted. They flourished in the towns and villages which dot the vast plain that stretches like a garden for 200 miles along the foot of the Alps; they existed in those romantic and fertile valleys over which the great mountains hang their pine forests and snows, and, passing the summit, they extended into the southern provinces of France, even as far as to the Rhone, on the banks of which Polycarp, the disciple of John, in early times had planted the gospel, to be watered in the succeeding centuries by the blood of thousands of martyrs. Darkness gives relief to the light, and error necessitates a fuller development and a clearer definition of truth. On this principle the ninth century produced the most remarkable perhaps of all those great champions who strove to set limits to the growing superstition, and to preserve, pure and undefiled, the faith which the Apostles had preached. The mantle of Ambrose descended on Claudio, Archbishop of Turin. This man beheld with dismay the stealthy approaches of a power which, putting out the eyes of men, bowed their necks to its yoke, and bent their knees to idols. He grasped the sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God, and the battle which he so courageously waged, delayed, though it could not prevent, the fall of his Church's independence, and for two centuries longer the light continued to shine at the foot of the Alps. Claudio was an earnest and indefatigable student of Holy Scripture. That Book carried him back to the first age, and set him down at the feet of Apostles, at the feet of One greater than Apostles; and, while darkness was descending on the earth, around Claudio still shone the day.

The truth, drawn from its primeval fountains, he proclaimed throughout his diocese, which included the valleys of the Waldenses. Where his voice could not reach, he labored to convey instruction by his pen. He wrote commentaries on the Gospels; he published expositions of almost all the epistles of Paul, and several books of the Old Testament; and thus he furnished his contemporaries with the means of judging how far it became them to submit to a jurisdiction so manifestly usurped as that of Rome, or to embrace tenets so undeniably novel as those which she was now foisting upon the world. The sum of what Claudio maintained was that there is but one Sovereign in the Church, and He is not on earth; that Peter had no superiority over the other Apostles, save in this, that he was the first who preached the gospel to both Jews and Gentiles; that human merit is of no avail for salvation, and that faith alone saves us. On this cardinal point he insists with a clearness and breadth which remind one of Luther. The authority of tradition he repudiates, prayers for the dead he condemns, as also the notion that the Church cannot err. As regards relics, instead of holiness he can find in them nothing but rottenness, and advises that they be instantly returned to the grave, from which they ought never to have been taken.

Of the Eucharist, he writes in his commentary on Matthew (A.D. 815) in a way which shows that he stood at the greatest distance from the opinions which Paschasius Radbertus broached eighteen years afterwards.

Paschasius Radbertus, a monk, afterwards Abbot of Corbei, pretended to explain with precision the manner in which the body and blood of Christ are present in the Eucharist.

He published (831) a treatise, "Concerning the Sacrament of the Body and Blood of Christ." His doctrine amounted to the two following propositions: –

- 1. Of the bread and wine nothing remains after consecration but the outward figure, under which the body and blood of Christ are really and locally present.
- 2. This body present in the Eucharist is the same body that was born of the Virgin, that suffered upon the cross, and was raised from the grave.

This new doctrine excited the astonishment of not a few, and called forth several powerful opponents – amongst others, Johannes Scotus. Claudio, however, thought that the Lord's Supper was a memorial of Christ's death, and not a repetition of it, and that the elements of bread and wine were only symbols of the flesh and blood of the Savior. It is clear from this that transubstantiation was unknown in the ninth century to the churches at the foot of the Alps. Nor was it the Bishop of Turin only who held this doctrine of the Eucharist; we are entitled to infer that the bishops of neighboring dioceses, both north and south of the Alps, shared the opinion of Claude. For though they differed from him on some other points, and did not conceal their difference, they expressed no dissent from his views respecting the Sacrament, and in proof of their concurrence in his general policy, strongly urged him to continue his expositions of the Sacred Scriptures. Specially was this the case as regards two leading ecclesiastics of that day, Jonas, Bishop of Orleans, and the Abbot Theodemirus. Even in the century following, we find certain bishops of the north of Italy saying that "wicked men eat the goat and not the lamb," language wholly incomprehensible from the lips of men who believe in transubstantiation.

The worship of images was then making rapid strides. The Bishop of Rome was the great advocate of this ominous innovation; it was on this point that Claude fought his great battle. He resisted it with all the logic of his pen and all the force of his eloquence; he condemned the practice as idolatrous, and he purged those churches in his diocese which had begun to admit representations of saints and divine persons within their walls, not even sparing the cross itself. It is instructive to mark that the advocates of images in the ninth century justified their use of them by the very same arguments which Romanists employ at this day; and that Claude refutes them on the same ground taken by Protestant writers still. We do not worship the image, say the former, we use it simply as the medium through which our worship ascends to Him whom the image represents; and if we kiss the cross we do so in adoration of Him who died upon it. But, replied Claude – as the Protestant polemic at this hour replies in kneeling to the image, or kissing the cross, you do what the second commandment forbids, and what the Scripture condemns as idolatry. Your worship terminates in the image, and is the worship not of God, but simply of the image. With his argument the Bishop of Turin mingles at times a little raillery. "God commands one thing," says he, "and these people do quite the contrary. God commands us to bear our cross, and not to worship it; but these are all for worshipping it, whereas they do not bear it at all. To serve God after this manner is to go away from Him. For if we ought to adore the cross because Christ was fastened to it, how many other things are there which touched Jesus Christ! Why don't they adore mangers and old clothes, because He was laid in a manger and wrapped in swaddling clothes? Let them

adore asses, because He, entered into Jerusalem upon the foal of an ass."

On the subject of the Roman primacy, he leaves it in no wise doubtful what his sentiments were. "We know very well," says he, "that this passage of the Gospel is very ill understood – 'Thou art Peter, and upon this rock will I build my church: and I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven,' under pretense of which words the stupid and ignorant common people, destitute of all spiritual knowledge, betake themselves to Rome in hopes of acquiring eternal life. The ministry belongs to all the true superintendents and pastors of the Church, who discharge the same as long as they are in this world; and when they have paid the debt of death, others succeed in their places, who enjoy the same authority and power. Know thou that he only is apostolic who is the keeper and guardian of the Apostle's doctrine, and not he who boasts himself to be seated in the chair of the Apostle, and in the meantime doth not acquit himself of the charge of the Apostle."

We have dwelt the longer on Claude, and the doctrines which he so powerfully advocated by both voice and pen, because, although the picture of his times – a luxurious clergy but an ignorant people, churches growing in magnificence but declining in piety, images adored but the true God forsaken – is not a pleasant one, yet it establishes two points of great importance. The first is that the Bishop of Rome had not yet succeeded in compelling universal submission to his jurisdiction; and the second that he had not yet been able to persuade all the churches of Christendom to adopt his novel doctrines, and follow his peculiar customs. Claude was not left to fight that battle alone, nor was he crushed as he inevitably would have been, had Rome been the dominant power it came soon thereafter to be. On the contrary, this Protestant of the ninth century received a large amount of sympathy and support both from bishops and from synods of his time. Agobardus, the Bishop of Lyons, fought by the side of his brother of Turin. In fact, he was as great an iconoclast as Claude himself. The emperor, Louis the Pious (le Debonnaire), summoned a Council (824) of "the most learned and judicious bishops of his realm," says Dupin, to discuss this question. For in that age the emperors summoned synods and appointed bishops. And when the Council had assembled, did it wait till Peter should speak, or a Papal allocution had decided the point? "It knew no other way," says Dupin, "to settle the question, than by determining what they should find upon the most impartial examination to be true, by plain text of Holy Scripture, and the judgment of the Fathers." This Council at Paris justified most of the principles for which Claude had contended, as the great Council at Frankfort (794) had done before it. It is worthy of notice further, as bearing on this point, that only two men stood up publicly to oppose Claude during the twenty years he was incessantly occupied in this controversy. The first was Dungulas, a recluse of the Abbey of St. Denis, an Italian, it is believed, and biased naturally in favor of the opinions of the Pope; and the second was Jonas, Bishop of Orleans, who differed from Claude on but the one question of images, and only to the extent of tolerating their use, but condemning as idolatrous their worship – a distinction which it is easy to maintain in theory, but impossible to observe, as experience has demonstrated, in practice.

And here let us interpose an observation. We speak at times of the signal benefits which

the "Church" conferred upon the Germanic (or Gothic) nations during the Middle Ages. She put herself in the place of a mother to those barbarous tribes; she weaned them from the savage usages of their original homes; she bowed their stubborn necks to the authority of law; she opened their minds to the charms of knowledge and art; and thus laid the foundation of those civilized and prosperous communities which have since arisen in the West. But when we so speak it behooves us to specify with some distinctness what we mean by the "Church" to which we ascribe the glory of this service. Is it the Church of Rome, or is it the Church universal of Christendom? If we mean the former, the facts of history do not bear out our conclusion. The Church of Rome was not then the Church, but only one of many Churches. The slow but beneficent and laborious work of evangelizing and civilizing the Northern nations, was the joint result of the action of all the churches – of Northern Italy, of France, of Spain, of Germany, of Britain – and each performed its part in this great work with a measure of success exactly corresponding to the degree in which it retained the pure principles of primitive Christianity. The churches would have often done their task much more effectually and speedily but for the adverse influence of Rome. She hung upon their rear, by her perpetual attempts to bow them to her yoke, and to seduce them from their first purity to her thinly disguised paganism. Emphatically, the power that molded the Gothic nations, and planted among them the seeds of religion and virtue, was Christianity – that same Christianity which the Apostles preached to men in the first age, which all the ignorance and superstition of subsequent times had not quite extinguished, and which, with immense toil and suffering dug up from under the heaps of rubbish that had been piled above it, was anew, in the sixteenth century, given to the world under the name of Protestantism.

When Claude died it can hardly be said that his mantle was taken up by any one. The battle, although not altogether dropped, was henceforward languidly maintained. Before this time not a few churches beyond the Alps had submitted to the yoke of Rome, and that arrogant power must have felt it not a little humiliating to find her authority withheld on what she might regard as her own territory. She was venerated abroad but contemned at home. Attempts were renewed to induce the Bishops of Milan to accept the episcopal pall, the badge of spiritual vassalage, from the Pope; but it was not till the middle of the eleventh century (1059), under Nicholas II, that these attempts were successful. Petrus Damianus, Bishop of Ostia, and Anselm, Bishop of Lucca, were dispatched by the Pontiff to receive the submission of the Lombard Churches, and the popular tumults amid which that submission was extorted sufficiently show that the spirit of Claude still lingered at the foot of the Alps. Nor did the clergy conceal the regret with which they laid their ancient liberties at the feet of a power before which the whole earth was then bowing down; for the Papal legate, Damianus, informs us that the clergy of Milan maintained in his presence, "That the Ambrosian Church, according to the ancient institutions of the Fathers, was always free, without being subject to the laws of Rome, and that the Pope of Rome had no jurisdiction over their Church as to the government or constitution of it."

But if the plains were conquered, not so the mountains. A considerable body of Protesters stood out against this deed of submission. Of these some crossed the Alps, descended the Rhine, and raised the standard of opposition in the diocese of Cologne, where they were

branded as Manicheans, and rewarded with the stake. Others retired into the valleys of the Piedmontese Alps, and there maintained their scriptural faith and their ancient independence. What we have just related respecting the dioceses of Milan and Turin settles the question, in our opinion, of the apostolicity of the churches of the Waldensian valleys. It is not necessary to show that missionaries were sent from Rome in the first age to plant Christianity in these valleys, nor is it necessary to show that these churches have existed as distinct and separate communities from early days; enough that they formed a part, as unquestionably they did, of the great evangelical church of the north of Italy. This is the proof at once of their apostolicity and their independence. It attests their descent from Apostolic men, if doctrine be the life of churches. When their co-religionists on the plains entered within the pale of the Roman jurisdiction, they retired within the mountains, and, spurning alike the tyrannical yoke and the corrupt tenets of the Church of the Seven Hills, they preserved in its purity and simplicity the faith their fathers had handed down to them. Rome manifestly was the schismatic, she it was that had abandoned what was once the common faith of Christendom, leaving by that step to all who remained on the old ground the indisputably valid title of the True Church.

Behind this rampart of mountains, which Providence, foreseeing the approach of evil days, would almost seem to have reared on purpose, did the remnant of the early Apostolic church of Italy kindle their lamp, and here did that lamp continue to burn all through the long night which descended on Christendom. There is a singular concurrence of evidence in favor of their high antiquity. Their traditions invariably point to an unbroken descent from the earliest times, as regards their religious belief. The Nobla Leycon, which dates from the year 1100, goes to prove that the Waldenses of Piedmont did not owe their rise to Peter Waldo of Lyons, who did not appear till the latter half of that century (1160). The Nobla Leycon, though a poem, is in reality a confession of faith, and could have been composed only after some considerable study of the system of Christianity, in contradistinction to the errors of Rome. How could a church have arisen with such a document in her hands? Or how could these herdsmen and vine-dressers, shut up in their mountains, have detected the errors against which they bore testimony, and found their way to the truths of which they made open profession in times of darkness like these? If we grant that their religious beliefs were the heritage of former ages, handed down from an evangelical ancestry, all is plain; but if we maintain that they were the discovery of the men of those days, we assert what approaches almost to a miracle. Their greatest enemies, Claude Seyssel of Turin (1517), and Reynerius the Inquisitor (1250), have admitted their antiquity, and stigmatized them as "the most dangerous of all heretics, because the most ancient."

Rorenco, Prior of St. Roch, Turin (1640), was employed to investigate the origin and antiquity of the Waldenses, and of course had access to all the Waldensian documents in the ducal archives, and being their bitter enemy he may be presumed to have made his report not more favorable than he could help. Yet he states that "they were not a new sect in the ninth and tenth centuries, and that Claude of Turin must have detached them from the Church in the ninth century."

Within the limits of her own land did God provide a dwelling for this venerable church

and nation. Let us bestow a glance upon the region. As one comes from the south, across the level plain of Piedmont, while yet nearly a hundred miles off, he sees the Alps rise before him, stretching like a great wall along the horizon. From the gates of the morning to those of the setting sun, the mountains run on in a line of towering magnificence.

Pasturages and chestnut-forests clothe their base; eternal snows crown their summits. How varied are their forms! Some rise strong and massy as castles; others shoot up tall and tapering like needles; while others again run along in serrated lines, their summits torn and cleft by the storms of many thousand winters. At the hour of sunrise, what a glory kindles along the crest of that snowy rampart! At sunset the spectacle is again renewed, and a line of pyres is seen to burn in the evening sky.

Drawing nearer the hills, on a line about thirty miles west of Turin, there opens before one what seems a great mountain portal. This is the entrance to the Waldensian territory. A low hill drawn along in front serves as a defense against all who may come with hostile intent, as but too frequently happened in times gone by, while a stupendous monolith – the Castelluzzo – shoots up to the clouds, and stands sentinel at the gate of this renowned region. As one approaches La Torre the Castelluzzo rises higher and higher, and irresistibly fixes the eye by the perfect beauty of its pillar-like form. But to this mountain a higher interest belongs than any that mere symmetry can give it. It is indissolubly linked with martyr-memories, and borrows a halo from the achievements of the past. How often, in days of old, was the confessor hurled sheer down its awful steep and dashed on the rocks at its foot! And there, commingled in one ghastly heap, growing ever the bigger and ghastlier as another and yet another victim was added to it, lay the mangled bodies of pastor and peasant, of mother and child!

The elegant temple of the Waldenses rises near the foot of the Castelluzzo. The Waldensian valleys are seven in number; they were more in ancient times, but the limits of the Vaudois territory have undergone repeated curtailment, and now only the number we have stated remain, lying between Pinerolo on the east and Monte Viso on the west – that pyramidal hill which forms so prominent an object from every part of the plain of Piedmont, towering as it does above the surrounding mountains, and, like a horn of silver, cutting the ebon of the firmament.

The first three valleys run out somewhat like the spokes of a wheel, the spot on which we stand – the gateway, namely – being the nave. Beyond the extremity of the first three valleys are the remaining four, forming, as it were, the rim of the wheel. These last are enclosed in their turn by a line of lofty and craggy mountains, which form a wall of defense around the entire territory. Each valley is a fortress, having its own gate of ingress and egress, with its caves, and rocks, and mighty chestnut-trees, forming places of retreat and shelter, so that the highest engineering skill could not have better adapted each several valley to its end. It is not less remarkable that, taking all these valleys together, each is so related to each, and the one opens so into the other, that they may be said to form one fortress of amazing and matchless strength – wholly impregnable, in fact. All the fortresses of Europe, though combined, would not form a citadel so enormously strong, and so dazzlingly magnificent, as the mountain dwelling of the Vaudois. "The Eternal, our God," says Leger "having destined this land to be the theater of His marvels,

and the bulwark of His ark, has, by natural means, most marvelously fortified it."

These valleys are lovely and fertile, as well as strong. They are watered by numerous torrents, which descend from the snows of the summits. In the heart of their mountains is situated the most interesting, perhaps, of all their valleys. It was in this retreat, walled round by "hills whose heads touch heaven," that their barbes or pastors, from all their several parishes, were wont to meet in annual synod. It was here that their college stood, and it was here that their missionaries were trained, and, after ordination, were sent forth to sow the good seed, as opportunity offered, in other lands. And it was here where the pre-Protestant communities existed, governed according to the Ten Commandments.

One would like to have a near view of the barbes or pastors, who presided over the school of early Protestant theology that existed here, and to know how it fared with evangelical Christianity in the ages that preceded the Reformation. But the time is remote, and the events are dim. We can but doubtfully glean from a variety of sources the facts necessary to form a picture of this venerable Church, and even then the picture is not complete. The theology of which this was one of the fountainheads was not the clear, well-defined, and comprehensive system of the era of the Protestant Reformation; it was only what the faithful men of the Lombard Churches had been able to save from the wreck of primitive Christianity. True religion, being a revelation, was from the beginning complete and perfect; nevertheless, in this as in every other branch of knowledge, it is only by patient labor that man is able to extricate and arrange all its parts, and to come into the full possession of truth. The theology taught in former ages, in the peak-environed valley in which we have in imagination placed ourselves, was drawn from the Bible. The atoning death and justifying righteousness of Christ was its cardinal truth. This, the Nobla Leycon and other ancient documents abundantly testify. The Nobla Leycon sets forth with tolerable clearness the doctrine of the Trinity, the fall of man, the incarnation of the Son, the perpetual authority of the Decalogue as given by God, the need of Divine grace in order to good works, the necessity of holiness, the institution of the ministry, the resurrection of the body, and the eternal bliss of heaven. This creed, its professors exemplified in lives of evangelical virtue. The blamelessness of the Waldenses passed into a proverb, so that one more than ordinarily exempt from the vices of his time was sure to be suspected of being a Vaudes. If doubt there were regarding the tenets of the Waldenses, the charges which their enemies have preferred against them would set that doubt at rest, and make it tolerably certain that they held substantially what the Apostles before their day, and the Reformers after it, taught. The indictment against the Waldenses included a formidable list of "heresies." They held that there had been no true Pope since the days of Sylvester; that temporal offices and dignities were not meet for preachers of the gospel; that the Pope's pardons were a cheat; that purgatory was a fable; that relics were simply rotten bones which had belonged to no one knew whom; that to go on pilgrimage served no end, save to empty one's purse; that flesh might be eaten any day if one's appetite served him; that holy water was not a whit more efficacious than rain water; and that prayer in a barn was just as effectual as if offered in a church. They were accused, moreover, of having scoffed at the doctrine of transubstantiation, and of having spoken blasphemously of Rome, as the harlot of the Apocalypse. There is reason to believe that the Waldenses possessed the New Testament in the vernacular. The "Lingua

Romana" or Romaunt tongue was the common language of the south of Europe from the eighth to the fourteenth century. It was the language of the troubadours and of men of letters in the Dark Ages. Into this tongue – the Romaunt – was the first translation of the whole of the New Testament made so early as the twelfth century. It seems that all the books of the New Testament were translated from the Latin Vulgate into the Romaunt, that this was the first literal version since the fall of the empire, that it was made in the twelfth century, and was the first translation available for popular use. There were numerous earlier translations, but only of parts of the Word of God, and many of these were rather paraphrases or digests of Scripture than translations, and, moreover, they were so bulky, and by consequence so costly, as to be utterly beyond the reach of the common people. This Romaunt version was the first complete and literal translation of the New Testament of Holy Scripture; it was made most probably under the superintendence and at the expense of Peter Waldo of Lyons, not later than 1180, and so is older than any complete version in German, French, Italian, Spanish, or English. This version was widely spread in the south of France, and in the cities of Lombardy. It was in common use among the Waldenses of Piedmont, and it was no small part, doubtless, of the testimony borne to truth by these mountaineers to preserve and circulate it. Of the Romaunt New Testament six copies have come down to our day. A copy is preserved at each of the four following places, Lyons, Grenoble, Zurich, Dublin; and two copies are at Paris. These are plain and portable volumes, contrasting with those splendid and ponderous folios of the Latin Vulgate, penned in characters of gold and silver, richly illuminated, their bindings decorated with gems, inviting admiration rather than study, and unfitted by their size and splendor for the use of the people.

The church of the Alps, in the simplicity of its constitution, may be held to have been a reflection of the church of the first centuries. The entire territory included in the Waldensian limits was divided into parishes. In each parish was placed a pastor, who led his flock to the living waters of the Word of God. He preached, he dispensed the sacraments, he visited the sick, and catechized the young. With him was associated in the government of his congregation a consistory of laymen. The synod met once a year. It was composed of all the pastors, with an equal number of laymen, and its most frequent place of meeting was the secluded mountain-engirdled valley at the head of Angroyna. Sometimes as many as a hundred and fifty barbes, with the same number of lay members, would assemble. We can imagine them seated – it may be on the grassy slopes of the valley – a venerable company of humble, learned, earnest men, presided over by a simple moderator (for higher office or authority was unknown amongst them), and intermitting their deliberations respecting the affairs of their Churches, and the condition of their flocks, only to offer their prayers and praises to the Eternal, while the majestic snow-clad peaks looked down upon them from the silent firmament. There needed, verily, no magnificent fane, no blazonry of mystic rites to make their assembly august.

The youth who here sat at the feet of the more venerable and learned of their barbes used as their textbook the Holy Scriptures. And not only did they study the sacred volume; they were required to commit to memory, and be able accurately to recite, whole Gospels and Epistles. This was a necessary accomplishment on the part of public instructors, in those ages when printing was unknown, and copies of the Word of God were rare. Part of

their time was occupied in transcribing the Holy Scriptures, or portions of them, which they were to distribute when they went forth as missionaries. By this, and by other agencies, the seed of the Divine Word was scattered throughout Europe more widely than is commonly supposed. To this a variety of causes contributed. There was then a general impression that the world was soon to end. Men thought that they saw the prognostications of its dissolution in the disorder into which all things had fallen. The pride, luxury, and profligacy of the clergy led not a few laymen to ask if better and more certain guides were not to be had. Many of the troubadours were religious men, whose lays were sermons. The hour of deep and universal slumber had passed; the serf was contending with his seigneur for personal freedom, and the city was waging war with the baronial castle for civic and corporate independence. The New Testament – and, as we learn from incidental notices, portions of the Old – coming at this juncture, in a language understood alike in the court as in the camp, in the city as in the rural hamlet, was welcome to many, and its truths obtained a wider promulgation than perhaps had taken place since the publication of the Vulgate by Jerome.

After passing a certain time in the school of the barbes, it was not uncommon for the Waldensian youth to proceed to the seminaries in the great cities of Lombardy, or to the Sorbonne at Paris. There they saw other customs, were initiated into other studies, and had a wider horizon around them than in the seclusion of their native valleys. Many of them became expert dialecticians, and often made converts of the rich merchants with whom they traded, and the landlords in whose houses they lodged. The priests seldom cared to meet in argument the Waldensian missionary. To maintain the truth in their own mountains was not the only object of this people. They felt their relations to the rest of Christendom. They sought to drive back the darkness, and re-conquer the kingdoms which Rome had overwhelmed. They were an evangelistic as well as an evangelical church. It was an old law among them that all who took orders in their church should, before being eligible to a home charge, serve three years in the mission field. The youth on whose head the assembled barbes laid their hands saw in prospect not a rich benefice, but a possible martyrdom. The ocean they did not cross. Their mission field was the realms that lay outspread at the foot of their own mountains. They went forth two and two, concealing their real character under the guise of a secular profession, most commonly that of merchants or peddlers. They carried silks, jewelry, and other articles, at that time not easily purchasable save at distant marts, and they were welcomed as merchants where they would have been spurned as missionaries. The door of the cottage and the portal of the baron's castle stood equally open to them. But their address was mainly shown in vending, without money and without price, rarer and more valuable merchandise than the gems and silks which had procured them entrance. They took care to carry with them, concealed among their wares or about their persons, portions of the Word of God, their own transcription commonly, and to this they would draw the attention of the inmates. When they saw a desire to possess it, they would freely make a gift of it where the means to purchase were absent.

There was no kingdom of Southern and Central Europe to which these missionaries did not find their way, and where they did not leave traces of their visit in the disciples whom they made. On the west they penetrated into Spain. In Southern France they found

congenial fellow-laborers in the Albigenses, by whom the seeds of truth were plentifully scattered over Dauphine and Languedoc. On the east, descending the Rhine and the Danube, they leavened Germany, Bohemia, and Poland with their doctrines, their track being marked with the edifices for worship and the stakes of martyrdom that arose around their steps. Even the Seven-hilled City they feared not to enter, scattering the seed on ungenial soil, if perchance some of it might take root and grow. Their naked feet and coarse woolen garments made them somewhat marked figures, in the streets of a city that clothed itself in purple and fine linen; and when their real errand was discovered, as sometimes chanced, the rulers of Christendom took care to further, in their own way, the springing of the seed, by watering it with the blood of the men who had sowed it.

Thus did the Bible in those ages, veiling its majesty and its mission, travel silently through Christendom, entering homes and hearts, and there making its abode. From her lofty seat Rome looked down with contempt upon the Book and its humble bearers. She aimed at bowing the necks of kings, thinking if they were obedient meaner men would not dare revolt, and so she took little heed of a power which, weak as it seemed, was destined at a future day to break in pieces the fabric of her dominion. By-and-by she began to be uneasy, and to have a boding of calamity. The penetrating eye of Innocent III detected the quarter whence danger was to arise. He saw in the labors of these humble men the beginning of a movement which, if permitted to go on and gather strength, would one day sweep away all that it had taken the toils and intrigues of centuries to achieve. He straightway commenced those terrible crusades which wasted the sowers but watered the seed, and helped to bring on, at its appointed hour, the catastrophe which he sought to avert.

So we see in this people called the Waldenses, who lived separate from all the rest of the world, a people and nation who served God in the ancient purity of his worship, and never submitted to the church of Rome. Their residence was the place especially meant in the 12th chapter of Revelation, 6th verse, as prepared of God for the woman, that they should feed her there during the reign of Antichrist. Some of the Popish writers themselves own, that this people never submitted to the church of Rome. One of the popish writers, speaking of the Waldenses, says, "The heresy of the Waldenses is the oldest heresy in the world." It is supposed that they first betook themselves to this place among the mountains, to hide themselves from the severity of the heathen persecutions which existed before Constantine the Great. And thus the woman fled into the wilderness from the face of the serpent, Revelation 12:6, 14. "And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place: where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent." The people being settled there, their posterity continued from age to age: and being, as it were, by natural walls, as well as by God's grace, separated from the rest of the world, they never partook of the overflowing corruption. These especially were those virgins who were not defiled, when other churches prostituted themselves; but they kept themselves pure for Christ alone. They followed the Lamb, their spiritual husband, whithersoever he went: they followed him into this hideous wilderness, Revelation 14:4, 5. Their doctrine and worship appear to be the same with the Protestant doctrine and worship; and by the confession of Popish writers, they were a people remarkable for the strictness of their

lives, for charity and other Christian virtues. They lived in external poverty in this hideous country; but they chose this rather than comply with the great corruptions of the rest of the world. Both their civil and their ecclesiastical government was according to the Ten Commandments, hence these were the two witnesses spoken of in Revelation 11. Living in so secret a place, it was a long time before they were noticed. But at last, falling under observation, the Romanists went out in mighty armies against them, fell upon them with insatiable cruelty, barbarously massacring and putting to death men, women, and children, with all imaginable tortures. Their enemies continued persecuting them with but little intermission for several hundred years; by which means many were driven out of the valleys of Piedmont. These fled into all parts of Europe, carrying with them their doctrine. Their persecutors could not by all their cruelties extirpate the church of God; so fulfilling his word, "that the gates of hell should not prevail against it."

Besides this central and main body of oppositionists to Rome – Protestants before Protestantism – placed here as in an impregnable fortress, upreared on purpose, in the very center of Roman Christendom, other communities and individuals arose, and maintained a continuous line of Protestant testimony and witness. So in every age of this dark time, there appeared particular persons in all parts of Christendom who bore a testimony against the corruptions and tyranny of the Church of Rome. There is no one age of Antichrist, even in the darkest times, but ecclesiastical historians mention many by name who manifested an abhorrence of the pope, and his idolatrous worship, and pleaded for the ancient purity of doctrine and worship. God was pleased to maintain an uninterrupted succession of many witnesses through the whole time, in Germany, France, Britain, and other countries; private persons and ministers, some magistrates and persons of great distinction. And there were numbers in every age who were persecuted and put to death for this testimony.

Nevertheless, it must be clearly kept in mind, that these were witnesses in the midst of a wilderness of ignorance. In this age even the pre-Protestants themselves maintained errors which would have to be addressed in the era of Protestant Reformation. In this era of church history, the light of God's word shined through thick clouds of darkness.

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CHAPTER 16 : TWO WITNESSES IN THE WILDERNESS

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The on-line resources of Historicism Research Foundation at <http://www.historicism.net/> also proved invaluable for my understanding of Biblical prophecy. Biblical prophecy concerning Christian church history, especially as revealed in the book of Revelation, serves as the foundation upon which all church histories should be based.

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