

BOOK REVIEWS

Audisio, Gabriel. *Preachers by Night: The Waldensian Barbes (15th to 16th Centuries)*, trans. Claire Davison. Studies in Medieval and Reformation Traditions. Lieden: Brill, 2007. 264 pp. Hardcover, \$148.00.

Gabriel Audisio is Professor Emeritus of Early Modern History at the University of Provence, France. Specializing in religious and cultural history, he has published in French, English, German, and Italian. His works include *The Waldensian Dissent c. 1170-c. 1570* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

This work traces the history of the itinerant “Preachers by Night” who struggled to maintain a faith in God in spite of the Inquisition under which they suffered persecution and privation from the twelfth to the sixteenth centuries. They were a group of arduous and pious men whose passion it was to maintain a clandestine but fervent faith. In their travels throughout Europe, they spread their confession of faith following the example and gospel of Christ. In fact, “The poor of Lyons were throwing doubt on the very authority of the (Roman) Church.” The Preachers declared that “Our prayers should be addressed to God alone” (47).

The book is divided into ten chapters and has a conclusion, bibliography, and indices. In chapter 1, the author states: “In the beginning, we find Vaudes. If it is quite usual to find one founding figure at the origin of a sect, what is striking in the case of the Waldensians is that the founder remains in the shadows, despite enquiry and research intended to bring him to light. Even his first name is unknown to us” (5). Audisio also contends that “Everything began in Lyons around 1170.” Thus the author maintains that Vaudes, later known as Peter Waldo, was the originator of these ancient people (5).

Chapter 2 discusses the organization and origin of the Waldensian pastors. Based upon their study of Scripture, they rejected the traditions of Rome and, in so doing, became heretics. They called themselves by several names, including the “Poor of Christ,” “Barbes,” “Pastors,” or “Brothers.”

Chapter 3 describes how generations of persecution and repression broke apart the Waldensian communities, resulting in a diaspora across Europe “from Apulia to the Baltic, from Provence to Poland” (51). At this time, “Die Bruders” traveled as missionaries to all parts of Europe. How they traveled one can only imagine—perhaps by horse, cart, or carriage. At any rate, it is one thousand kilometers from the Piedmont valleys to Bohemia, which could take up to a month to traverse by foot.

Chapter 4 describes how it became increasingly difficult to identify the Barbes simply by their names. The author provides a lengthy discussion on identifying the Barbes during the period he refers to as “the time of the Barbes.” In theory, he explains, “the Barbe has two different Christian names, the one by which he was baptized and the one he was given when he was admitted to the body of believers” (85). The result of having multiple names creates a difficulty for researchers when searching for sources of information

that will provide a global and quantitative picture of just how widespread the Barbes traveled and settled.

Chapter 5 explores the Barbes' mission and the organization of the community. They were after all "Mere country folk" (95). One noteworthy example is the statement of a young man, who, when questioned as to how he was trained and chosen, replied that "his father had taught him the faith and the Waldensian heresy, and had begun taking him with him in the lands and regions of Italy" (99). Before a preacher could be received into the sect, he must have been approved and well educated. Barbes studied the NT for four to five years until they knew the entire Testament by heart (100).

Chapter 6 describes the Barbes' way of life. They were pious men who were trained and educated in the trades including doctor, surgeon, and barber. Surviving Waldensian literature affirms that "the Barbes were particularly attentive to the sick, the infirm and the injured, and they developed skills that would enable them to bring solace," following Christ's instructions to 'Heal the sick' (Matt 10:8)" (129).

Chapter 7 describes the life of service lived by the Barbes. The Barbes lived a life of mission to the wider communities in which they lived and traveled. Wherever they went they gathered their congregations, preached to them, cared for the sick, and generally helped the community in any way they could. In return, the Waldensian community financed and protected them. Audisio notes that "The Barbs brought unity to the diaspora, however far flung it became. . . . [F]rom generation to generation whatever perils were to be faced, the dissent was handed down; in their eyes it was the light of truth" (167).

Chapter 8 is a discourse on the effectiveness of the Preachers and their religious teaching and the opinions held by the Waldensian community. Audisio states that "There were many false accusations of the Pastors by the Inquisitor and the Priest. However, history stands true that the Barbes are held in the highest of esteem by every single Waldensian. It was clear in the Waldensians' mind that the "Barbes were not ecclesiasts, nor did they seek to pass them off as such" (200). They constituted the very framework of the community. "Only their courageous, effective support can account for the longevity of the Waldensian dissent of which the barbes were not only the symbol but the very condition of its unity and permanence" (200).

In chapter 9, the Waldensians meet with the Reformers. There were many debates and synods during this period to discuss points of faith held by the several groups. Officially, the most famous meeting was at Chanforan. One of the more important resolutions to emerge from the Chanforan meeting was the decision to print the Bible. It was voted that the Bible would be printed in French rather than Romance, the language formerly used in Waldensian texts. Pierre Robert Olivetan prepared the work, which became known, as a consequence, as the Olivetan Bible. This work first appeared in 1535 and includes a preface or Apology of the translator: "[S]o many sects and heresies, troubles and tumults, were emerging in these times in the world, and this was because the people did not know the Work of God; and seeing copies of vernacular, copied out by hand in times long since past, we could not even

remember when, which could only be of use to few people, you admonished all the other Brothers, for the honour of God and the good of all Christians who knew the French language, and so that they might rid themselves of any false doctrine that debases the truth, saying that it would be most expedient and necessary to purify the Bible in French according to the Hebrew and Greek. Hearing this, our Brothers agreed joyously and good-heartedly, doing their utmost in all ways so that this undertaking might be realized" (218-219).

In Chapter 10, Audisio describes how the Barbes disappeared off the scene of history at the time of the Reformation. After meeting with the Reformers at Chanforan, the Waldensian Church was totally reorganized and there was no longer a need for the "Preachers by Night." Commenting on the significance of the Waldensian Barbes, Audisio notes that "It thus becomes clear that the long adventure of the Barbes, a saga with its epic overtones despite its rural characters and setting, still echoes on in collective memory today." At one time, the Waldensians were the only Reformist community left on Italian soil (248). Throughout the records of the Inquisition not a few witnesses stated that the Barbes were men of high integrity. One notation commented that "The Barbes lead apostolic lives which is why they must be believed more than the priests of the Church of Rome whose lives are too lax" (193).

Despite some bias, *Preachers by Night* is a work that offers one useful perspective among others on Waldensian history. It will appeal to both specialists and general readers with an interest in European cultural history, the origins of Protestantism, medieval dissent, and schisms in the Roman Catholic Church.

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Chilcote, Paul Wesley, ed. *Early Methodist Spirituality: Selected Women's Writings*. Nashville: Kingswood, Abingdon, 2007. xvi + 396 pp. Paper, \$39.00.

Paul Wesley Chilcote, President of the Charles Wesley Society, is the author/editor of at least ten books and many journal articles on the Wesleyan tradition and shares responsibility with Randy Maddox for editing volumes 12 and 13 on theology and doctrine in the *Bicentennial Edition of the Works of John Wesley*. Commencing with a doctoral dissertation in 1994 titled *John Wesley and the Women Preachers of Early Methodism*, Chilcote has investigated the neglected field of the role and experience of women in the powerful Wesleyan revival of the eighteenth century. Over the years, he has explored the relevant resources of the major archives of Wesleyan materials in both the UK and the USA and retrieved and published much that has previously been hidden. Furthermore, in so doing he has written insightful introductions that describe the work and contributions of each in a manner that uncovers not only the historical location and circumstances of women preachers' lives and work, but points to the deeper spirituality and devotion underlying their thought and ministry.

Titles, or parts of titles, of several of his previous publications reveal a dual focus in his work of bringing the inspiring lives of early women devotees to life with the purpose of encouraging and pointing the way toward spiritual