

Dear all, greetings.

In January of 1655, the Duke of Savoy forced a cruel choice upon the Waldensians of the lower valleys in Italy—either attend Catholic Mass, or move out of the valley within three days. Despite the bitter winter cold, approx. 2,000 men, women and children struggled away swollen rivers, snowy valleys, and ice-covered mountains and through the bitter cold.

The Waldensians in the upper valleys provided a temporary refuge and shared their limited winter provisions with the sudden inrush of refugees. But the worst was yet to come. As spring broke, in April 1655 the Duke of Savoy sent an army to the upper valleys. His “holy” Catholic intent was bloody and bloodthirsty.

On Sabbath, 24<sup>th</sup> April 1655, at 4:00 a.m., the signal was given for a general massacre.

The horrors of this massacre are indescribable. Not content to simply kill their victims, the soldiers and monks who accompanied them invented barbaric tortures: Babies and children had their limbs ripped off their bodies by sheer strength. Parents were forced to watch their children tortured to death before they themselves were tortured and killed. Fathers were forced to wear the decapitated heads of their children as the fathers were marched to their death. Some of these Christians were literally plowed into their own fields. Some were flayed or burned alive. Many endured worse. Unburied bodies—dead and alive—covered the ground.

Hundreds of the Waldensians fled for a large cave in the towering Mount Castelluzzo. The murderous papal soldiers, however, found them there and hurled them down the precipice to their death. This is the reference in Milton’s famous sonnet to “the bloody Piedmontese that rolled Mother with infant down the rocks.”

Survivors of this massacre were few, but they banded together and wrote to Christians in Europe for help. Their letters included the heart-rending words, “Our tears are no longer of water; they are of blood; they do not merely obscure our sight, they choke our very hearts.”

When Oliver Cromwell in England heard news of the barbaric massacre, he called for a national day of fasting in England and collected money to send to meet the physical needs of the Waldenses.

The poet John Milton honored the brave, uncompromising courage of the Waldenses with a now-famous sonnet:

**“On the Late Massacre in Piedmont”**

Avenge, O Lord, thy slaughtered saints, whose bones  
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,  
Even them who kept thy truth so pure of old,  
When all our fathers worshiped stocks and stones;  
Forget not: in thy book record their groans  
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold  
Slain by the bloody Piedmontese that rolled  
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans  
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they  
To Heaven. Their martyred blood and ashes sow  
O’er all th’ Italian fields where still doth sway

The triple tyrant; that from these may grow  
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way  
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

On reading this story my mind goes to the tens of thousands of western tourists who today throng the lower valleys of the Alps each year. In summer, they enjoy the mountain pastures, hiking, trekking, sailing and soaking in the beauty. In winter, they enjoy the powdered slopes and the full range of winter-sports available to the well-heeled.

And those who were literally ploughed into the soil? Their blood cries out to God for justice. Their blood cries out for them to be not forgotten or subsumed beneath our modern chasing of temporary pleasure at the matters of eternal consequence. As we face our own challenges in life, let us pause to reflect on the injustice suffered by others before we complain of this or that misfortune, of that troublesome saint or this horrendous winter weather, and maybe lift our voices in grateful praise to God for the life, liberty and freedom to worship Him according to our conscience that multitudes through the Dark Ages could only dream of.

Have a blessed Sabbath.

Conrad.