

## Waldensians

(also known variously as **Waldenses** (/wɔːlˈdɛnsiːz, wɒl-/), **Vallenses**, **Valdesi** or **Vaudois**) were an ascetic movement within Christianity, founded by Peter Waldo in Lyon around 1173.

The Waldensian movement first appeared in Lyon in the late 1170s and quickly spread to the Cottian Alps between what is today France and Italy. True to its historic roots, the Waldensian movement today is centred on Piedmont in Northern Italy, and small communities are also found in Southern Italy, Argentina, Brazil, Germany, the United States, and Uruguay.

The movement originated in the late twelfth century as the Poor Men of Lyon, a band organized by Peter Waldo, a wealthy merchant who gave away his property around 1173, preaching apostolic poverty as the way to perfection. Waldensian teachings quickly came into conflict with the Catholic Church. By 1215, the Waldensians were declared heretical and subject to intense persecution; the group was nearly annihilated in the 17th century and was confronted with organised and general discrimination in the centuries that followed. In the era of the Reformation, the Waldensians influenced early Swiss reformer Heinrich Bullinger. Upon finding the ideas of other reformers similar to their own, they quickly merged into the larger Protestant movement. With the Resolutions of Chanforan on 12 September 1532, they formally became a part of the Calvinist tradition.

In the 16th century, Waldensian leaders embraced the Protestant Reformation and joined various local Protestant regional entities. As early as 1631, Protestant scholars and Waldensian theologians themselves began to regard the Waldensians as early forerunners of the Reformation, who had maintained the apostolic faith in the face of Catholic oppression. Modern Waldensians share core tenets with Calvinists, including the priesthood of all believers, congregational polity and a "low" view of certain sacraments such as Communion and Baptism. They are members of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe and its affiliates worldwide.

The main denomination within the movement was the Waldensian Evangelical Church, the original church in Italy. In 1975, it merged with the Methodist Evangelical Church to form the Union of Methodist and Waldensian Churches—a majority Waldensian church, with a minority of Methodists.

Congregations continue to be active in Europe, South America, and North America. Organizations such as the American Waldensian Society maintain the history of this movement and declare they take as their mission "proclaiming the Christian Gospel, serving the marginalized, promoting social justice, fostering inter-religious work, and advocating respect for religious diversity and freedom of conscience.