

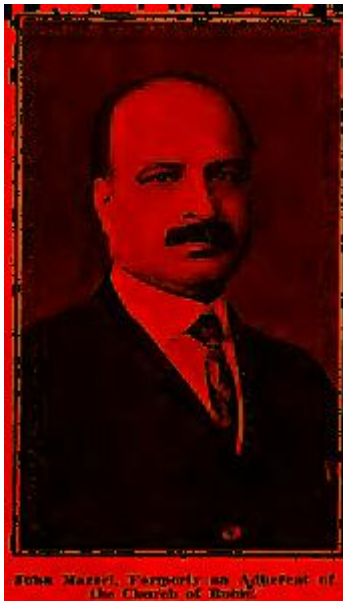
Liberty of Conscience in Italy



This is from a March 1920 publication of the **Converted Catholic Magazine** which was not found in the Lutheran Library. This article contains some interesting history how the much persecuted Waldenses obtained their rights as citizens and liberty of conscience by the King in spite of opposition by the Pope!

An Address Delivered in Christ's Mission, October 20, 1919

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There are few countries with which so many interesting associations are connected as with Italy. The student of history looks upon it as the seat of the longest-continued and most-extended dominion over the nations. It is the country in which the fourth great monarchy arose and extended its rule over all the then civilized world. When that vast empire came to an end, another, of a religio-political nature, rose on its ruins, whose influence over mankind has been far greater than that of its predecessor. The dominion of ancient Rome and its Caesars has been perpetuated in Rome and its Popes.

To the scholar Italy has indescribable charms, as the land of Cicero, of Tacitus, of Dante, of Tasso and a host of others, whose writings have

enlightened, stimulated and guided the minds and polished the manners of men.

But, to the Christian, Italy ranks next, in point of interest, to the land associated with the Saviour of the world. It was visited by Apostles; it was the scene of some of the earliest and most glorious conquests of Christianity, and its soil has been saturated with the blood of martyrs.

For the Protestant there is much in Italy to excite deep and peculiar emotions. It is the land in which the **Mystery of Iniquity** gradually arose and eventually overpowered the truth in all parts of Christendom, save in some of its own Alpine valleys and filled the Christian world with the ignorance and superstition of a baptized paganism.

It is a remarkable fact that **the Popes nowhere encountered a more steady, long-continued or powerful opposition than in Italy itself**. In that country Truth had an uninterrupted succession of defenders from the days of the Apostles till the Reformation. It was in her mountain valleys in Piedmont that the true Church found a retreat during more than a thousand years, while all the rest of Christendom gradually, and at length universally, bowed beneath the dominion of the worldly system of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Beginnings of Liberty.

On February 22, 1848, France is proclaimed a Republic. Prussia and Austria are in rebellion. Milan and Venice expel the Austrians. Victory smiles upon the Italian brotherhood.

However, [Radetsky](#) (a Czech nobleman and Austrian field marshal) receives powerful reinforcement and gains for his army what they previously had lost. He breaks the Italian gatherings at Sommacampagna (town in northern Italy). Charles Albert (King of Sardinia) retires with his disordered troops. Soon he abdicates in favor of his son Victor.

The day after the defeat. the magnanimous king voluntarily left for exile and died the following year.

From such sorrows were born the independence, the unity, the liberty of Italy. All honor to the martyrs of every party who sealed with blood and with the loss of every possession their faith in the destinies of a strong, glorious and prosperous united Italy!

The Waldenses, who for more than five centuries had suffered and fought for their evangelical faith, were up to this time not permitted to worship God according to the dictates of their consciences outside of the limited boundaries assigned to them. They were denied civil and political rights. The universities and all the public offices of every grade were closed to them; the liberal professions, too, were denied to them.

One by one restrictive laws against the Waldenses lost their force. The word "Emancipation" was pronounced. The Marchese Robert D'Azeglia (an aristocrat, painter, author, and statesman who was a leader of the movement that advocated an Italian national revival (Risorgimento) by the expulsion of all foreign influences from the then-divided Italian states) took the initiative,

asking that every obstacle be removed and that full liberty be granted to all subjects before the law, to the Waldenses and to the Jews.

On the night of February 16, 1848, the news spread in Turin that the king was about to sign the Act of Emancipation of the Waldenses. On February 17th the following edict appeared:

"The Waldenses are admitted to enjoy all rights, civil and political, of our subjects, to frequent the schools and the universities, and to be entitled to all academical degrees."

The valleys, at the announcement of the edict, broke forth into gladness. The hearts of the people beat with joy and praise to God and to the magnanimous king. As night fell every mountain, every hill, every peak shone forth a blaze of light; everyone carried torches.

On February 28th Turin began to celebrate the granting of the Constitution. All the provinces of Piedmont were sending their representatives. The deputation gathered upon Piazza Porta Nuova. Young girls in white dresses, with azure shoes (the colors of Piedmont), led the procession, followed by more than 600 persons. A velvet banner was carried, upon which shone in silver letters the words:

"To Charles Albert. The Waldenses recognized."

More than 30,000 flags unfurled in passing under the balcony where the king sat.

On the 4th of March were proclaimed the Statutes of the Kingdom. Article 24 reads as follows:

"All natives, whatever may be their titles or degrees, are equal before the law. All shall enjoy the rights, both "civil and political, and are admissible to the civil and military positions, except those determined by the law."

This article left in existence, for the Israelites, those old interdictions that contrasted with the spirit of the times and with the new principle of the State, which the Government and Parliament felt the necessity of giving to the Waldenses. Finally, by help and intervention of Parliament, on March 29, 1848, the Minister of the Interior, Ricci, presented a decree with his Majesty's signature, with which was ordered:

"The native-born Israelite (probably Jews) shall enjoy, from the date of this present, all civil rights and the faculty to follow the academical degrees."

Up to this time the Israelites had been excluded from the military service. To take away this last objection, Prince Eugene of Savoy Carignano, Lieutenant of the Kingdom, on the 15th of April, published a decree as follows:

The native-born Israelites are henceforth admitted to take part in the military service in conformity to the laws and discipline now existing."

The liberty of conscience in Italy was **first given to the Waldenses after many years of persecution**, and after all the craft and tricks and scares and interdictions and excommunications of the Papacy were unavailing. **They did not uprise to obtain it, but their faith in God and obedience to the law of the land, won for them victory.** They ceased not in pleading their cause whenever opportunity presented itself. They were the most trustworthy subjects the king had. They caused no trouble, except when Rome made trouble for them. These servants of the Lord had been tried and found to be true,

The king's heart was more tender than the Pope's. The king had heard his subjects cry and saw the tears that flowed down their cheeks. Christ said, "If your son asketh bread, will you give him a stone?" **The Pope, unlike Christ, had given them the stake and hot iron.** He now bit his tongue and raged, but the king did not hearken to his voice.

Italy, anciently great, was almost wiped from the map of Europe by the misconduct of him who claims to have the keys of Heaven and Hell.

May God bless us here in America and give us the strength and courage to teach and to preach the good news to all men! By doing so we follow in the footsteps of Him who loved us and redeemed us with His Blood to bring us nigh unto God, our Father.