

In light of the historical repression and daily travail experienced by the Waldensians, it is not surprising to find in their folklore “a sense of congenital sadness,” to use Pons’ phrase. Proverbs and legends reveal a people whose nature is “serious, melancholy, resigned, sad: more inclined to pain than to joy, to anxiety than to being carefree, and to pessimism than to optimism. . . . In fact, when one thinks of our ancestors’ troubled past, one is amazed at the fact that they were able to maintain themselves at an elevated level of resignation, without falling into desperation or the blackest fatalism.” Pons makes the sobering observation that in popular Waldensian traditions there is nowhere to be found a vision of a happy, playful, carefree life as is found plentifully among the Italian people and other Latin peoples. One occasionally finds a smile, but it never becomes a hearty, open, sonorous laugh.¹ Following is a sampling of Waldensian proverbs:

Fidatevi di tutti e di nessuno.
(Trust everyone and no one.)

L’uomo è nato per soffrire.
(Man is born to suffer.)

Bisogna soffrire per compatire.
(One needs to suffer in order to feel compassion.)

Tutti hanno la propria croce.
(Everyone has his own cross.)

Fai quel che devi, qualsiasi cosa avvenga.
(Do what you have to do, whatever may happen.)

Chi muore ha finito di tribolare.
(Whoever dies, ceases to know tribulation.)

Il male altrui non guarisce i nostri.
(The bad that comes to others doesn’t heal ours.)

Iddio non vuole contento nessuno, su questa terra.
(God doesn’t want anyone to be content, on this earth.)

Quando il povero vuol fare il pane, crolla il forno.
(When the poor man wants to make bread, the oven breaks down.)

Niente nemici, niente gloria.²
(No enemies, no glory.)

¹Pons, *Vita Montanara e Tradizioni Popolari Alpine (Valli Valdesi)*, 41-42.

²This last proverb was copied from a wall poster prominently displayed in a pizzeria in Torre Pellice in 1999. The others are found in Pons, *Vita Montanara e Tradizioni Popolari Alpine (Valli Valdesi)*, 42, 44.