

RESEARCH ARTICLE

A Waldensian Pastor Between the Confessional Myth and National Genealogy History and Religious Reform in Emilio Comba (1839–1904)

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Abstract

Emilio Comba, a leading Waldensian historian in the nineteenth century, was a strong advocate for nation-building in post-unification Italy. This article examines the relationship between Comba's "making Italians" endeavors and his historical writings, focusing mainly on his appropriation of the preceding confessional framework. As a fervent nationalist and evangelical pastor, Comba believed that true Risorgimento required not only political independence but also a religious reform of the Italian nation that would restore Italians to the original Religion of Christ. He envisioned this national reform as a realization of both liberty and the Gospel within the universal history of the Christian religion. Comba employed historical writings to support his claims, attempting to demonstrate how Italy was a perennially Protestant nation on the one hand and to serve as a *magistra vitae* for fellow citizens on the other. This article argues that Comba relied on a genealogical narrative structure inherited from the early modern protestant historiography in presenting his national history. By recasting its composition according to a category of the nation, he transformed a confessional genealogy of the true church into a national one. From a broader perspective, this article calls for further reflection on the role that the early modern intellectual framework played in the process of modern nation-building.

Keywords: Waldensians; historiography; national history; Risorgimento; Italy

I. Introduction

Post-unification Italy saw an unprecedented nation-building effort, which involved some Waldensian intellectuals in "making Italians" endeavors.¹ The Alpine

¹The principal works on this subject include Bruno Tobia, *Una patria per gli italiani: spazi, itinerari, monumenti nell'Italia unita (1870–1900)* (Bari: Laterza, 1991); Umberto Levra, *Fare gli Italiani: memoria e celebrazione del Risorgimento* (Torino: Comitato di Torino dell'Istituto per la storia del Risorgimento, 1992); Simonetta Soldani and Gabriele Turi, eds., *Fare gli italiani: scuola e cultura nell'Italia contemporanea* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 1994), Vol. 1, *La nascita dello Stato nazionale*; Albert Russell Ascoli and Krystyna Clara Von Henneberg, eds., *Making and Remaking Italy: The Cultivation of National Identity around the*

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Waldensians were one of the largest cultural and religious minorities in nineteenth-century Italy: being adherents of a reformed Protestantism and long segregated in the Piedmont valleys, their community had stronger ties with the northern Protestant countries than the rest of the peninsula; their pastors received their education in Switzerland, Netherlands, and England; they spoke a variant of Occitan in their “Valleys” and used French as communication language with the outside world.² However, with their civil emancipation in 1848 and especially after the unification, their pastors began engaging in missionary activities throughout the peninsula, participating in a new public sphere and becoming interested in national questions.³ Emilio Comba (1839–1904), a leading Waldensian historian in this period, was among them.⁴ From the 1870s, as a professor of church history at the Waldensian Faculty of Theology (Facoltà valdese di teologia) at Florence, Comba wrote numerous historical works in which he highlighted the Protestant nature of the Italian nation. He firmly believed that liberal Italy needed “religious reform” to eliminate the enduring hegemony of the Roman church and complete the political Risorgimento.

Discussing what Valdo Vinay called the “gradual Italianization” of the Waldensians, historians identified Comba as a prominent figure in this process.⁵ In Comba’s sole biography, Stefania Biagetti holds that he “made an important contribution to the integration of Waldensians into the national culture.”⁶ As for Comba’s historical research, some scholars, including Vinay and Biagetti, emphasize his empiricist attitude, while other historiographical reviews assert that he was still not free from confessional bias.⁷ A recent overview by Simone Maghenzani, even refuting a stereotype about the Waldensian historian, collocates his work on the Italian Reformation with a family of Protestant-national historiographies.⁸

Risorgimento (Oxford: Berg, 2001); Adriano Rocucci, ed., *La Costruzione dello stato-nazione in Italia* (Roma: Viella, 2012).

²On a general history of the Waldensians, see Giorgio Tourn, *I Valdesi: la singolare vicenda di un popolo-chiesa (1170–1976)*, 4th ed. (Torino: Claudiana, 2008).

³On the Waldensians in nineteenth century, see Giorgio Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, rep. (Torino: Claudiana, 1989); Valdo Vinay, *Storia dei Valdesi* (Torino: Claudiana, 1980), Vol. 3, *Dal movimento evangelico italiano al movimento ecumenico (1848–1978)*; Giorgio Spini, *Italia liberale e protestanti* (Torino: Claudiana, 2002); Giorgio Tourn, *Risorgimento e chiese cristiane* (Torino: Claudiana, 2011); Simone Maghenzani, ed., *Il protestantesimo italiano nel Risorgimento: influenze, miti, identità*. atti del LI Convegno di studi sulla Riforma e sui movimenti religiosi in Italia (Torre Pellice, settembre 2–4, 2011) (Torino: Claudiana, 2012).

⁴Stefania Biagetti, *Emilio Comba (1839–1904): storico della Riforma italiana e del movimento valdese medievale* (Torino: Claudiana, 1989).

⁵Valdo Vinay, *Storia dei Valdesi*, 181–203, 196, 331–333; Biagetti, *Emilio Comba (1839–1904)*; Spini, *Italia liberale e protestanti*, 87–94, 123–132.

⁶Biagetti, *Emilio Comba (1839–1904)*, 9. Unless otherwise noted, all translations are the author’s own.

⁷Delio Cantimori, “Recenti studi intorno alla Riforma in Italia e ai riformatori italiani all’estero (1924–1934),” *Rivista storica italiana* 5, no. 1 (1936): 1–28; Massimo Firpo, “Historiographical Introduction,” in *The Italian Reformation of the Sixteenth Century and the Diffusion of Renaissance Culture: A Bibliography of the Secondary Literature, ca. 1750–1997*, ed. John A. Tedeschi and James M. Lattis, Strumenti (Modena: F.C. Panini, 2000), XVIII–LVI.

⁸Simone Maghenzani, “Storiografia protestante e Riforma italiana del Cinquecento nell’età del Risorgimento,” in *Il protestantesimo italiano nel Risorgimento: influenze, miti, identità*. atti del LI Convegno di studi sulla Riforma e sui movimenti religiosi in Italia (Torre Pellice, settembre 2–4, 2011) (Torino: Claudiana, 2012), 127–144. See also Gian Paolo Romagnani, “Verso una nuova storia dei valdesi? Questioni di storiografia a mo’ di introduzione,” in *Valdesi e protestanti a Torino (XVIII–XX secolo): Convegno per i 150 anni del Tempio valdese, 1853–2003*, ed. Paolo Cozzo, Filippo De Pieri, and Andrea

However, since previous studies on Comba's historical works limited their interest to his confessional ideology or methodology, few have been done on his intellectual debt to the early modern confessional frameworks. Although it is undeniable that the concept of nation penetrated increasingly in European historiographies in the nineteenth century, the representation of the past connected to some kind of collective identity is hardly the invention *ex nihilo* of modern nation-builders.⁹ Indeed, the early modern Waldensians held a peculiar narrative of their past which strongly defined their communal identity through a mythical origin and genealogical succession. Nevertheless, the relationship between this earlier framework of the past and Comba's historical writings remains largely unexplored. The present article addresses this problem, investigating how Comba, writing along with a practical category of the nation, exploited preexisting historical narratives and, simultaneously, how early modern historiography conditioned his national history.¹⁰

In the second section of this article, I will briefly summarize the early modern Waldensian historiographies' basic character and historical development. Section III presents the situation of the Waldensians in the later nineteenth century. Section IV examines Comba's nationalistic idea of religious reform in Italy, pointing out its complex relationship with history. Since the Waldensian pastor consistently advocated this cause of reform until the last days of his life, and the argument remained constant in many of his writings, I examine his entire vision regarding its relationship to history rather than discussing each work separately. Section V discusses the narrative structure of his two principal works, *Storia della Riforma in Italia (History of Reformation in Italy, 1881)* and *I nostri protestanti (Our Protestants, 1895/97)*, demonstrating how Comba diverted the traditional Waldensian narrative into national history for presenting Italy's Protestant past. In conclusion, I will collocate the case of Comba in broader contexts—specifically the role of early modern confessional frameworks in building a modern European nation.

II. The Structure of the Early Modern Waldensian Historiography

According to today's scholarly consensus, the Waldensians trace their origins to the twelfth-century Lyon, and their name comes from its founder, Valdesius.¹¹ In the

Merlotti (Torino: S. Zamorani, 2005), 13–38; Giuseppe Giarrizzo, *La storiografia della nuova Italia*. Roma: Storia e letteratura, 2018, 200–201.

⁹On the nationalization of the past in the nineteenth century, see Eric J. Hobsbawm and Terence O. Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition*, Past and Present Publications (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983); Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan, and Kevin Passmore, eds., *Writing National Histories: Western Europe Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1999); Stefan Berger, Chris Lorenz, and Guy P Marchal, eds., *Writing the Nation*, 8 vols. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007). On the forging of the collective past before modern nationalism, see, for example, Aleida Assmann, *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (München: C. H. Beck, 1998), 48–61, 75–84; Judith Pollmann, *Memory in Early Modern Europe, 1500–1800* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 93–118; Erika Kuijpers et al., eds., *Memory before Modernity Practices of Memory in Early Modern Europe* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Marco Cavarzere, *Historical Culture and Political Reform in the Italian Enlightenment* (Oxford: Voltaire Foundation, 2020).

¹⁰On the concept of the nation as a practical category, see Rogers Brubaker, "Ethnicity without Groups," *European Journal of Sociology/Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 43, no. 2 (August 2002): 163–189.

¹¹On the medieval Waldensians, see Grado Giovanni Merlo, *Identità valdesi nella storia e nella storiografia: studi e discussioni* (Torino: Claudiana, 1991); Gabriel Audisio, *The Waldensian dissent: persecution and survival, c. 117–c. 1570* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999); Euan Cameron, *Waldenses:*

later Middle Ages, while the papacy persecuted them as heretics, many Waldensians sought refuge in the Alpine valleys, Calabria, and southern Germany. In 1532, the surviving Alpine Waldensians decided to embrace the Reformation and participated in the international Protestant networks.¹² Throughout the early modern ages, they suffered oppression from France and Savoy, which led to some infamous massacres.¹³ Many inhabitants of the French side of the Alpine were forced into exile; the Piemontese communities gained some autonomy in 1561 on condition of segregation in the so-called “Valleys,” though persecution and resistance lasted intermittently until 1730.

In early modern Europe, the myth of the Waldensians was widely known: many prominent scholars believed that they were remnants of the primitive church and preserved the true Religion from antiquity, untainted by the corruption of the Roman church.¹⁴ This myth originated in historical and theological disputes of the sixteenth century in which almost all confessions competed for historical legitimacy, declaring their succession from the apostolic church.¹⁵ When the Catholic historians developed a twofold criticism of reformers, equating them with the perennial heresy on the one hand and attacking their novelty on the other, Protestants exalted the past dissenters as forerunners of the Reformation.¹⁶ By considering Cathars, Hussites, and Savonarola as their precursors, reformers claimed the uninterrupted continuity of the

Rejections of Holy Church in Medieval Europe (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001); Peter Biller, *The Waldenses, 1170–1530: Between a Religious Order and a Church* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001); Marina Benedetti and Euan Cameron, eds., *A Companion to the Waldenses in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2022).

¹²The transformation into a Reformed church did not occur all at once in 1532 but took several decades. On this process, see Euan Cameron, *The Reformation of the Heretics: The Waldenses of the Alps, 1480–1580* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1984).

¹³On the early modern Waldensians, see Augusto Armand Hugon, *Storia dei valdesi II: Dall'adesione alla Riforma all'emancipazione, 1532–1848* (Torino: Claudiana, 1974); *I Valdesi e l'Europa* (Torre Pellice: Claudiana, 1982); Albert De Lange, ed., *Dall'Europa alle valli valdesi*. atti del XXIX Convegno storico internazionale: “Il glorioso rimpatrio (1689–1989): contesto-significato-immagine” (Torre Pellice, 3–7 settembre 1989) (Torino: Claudiana, 1990); Gian Paolo Romagnani, «Religionari». *Protestanti e valdesi nel Piemonte del Settecento* (Torino: Claudiana, 2021).

¹⁴On this myth in the early modern age, see Giovanni Gonnet, “Remarques sur l’historiographie vaudoise des XVIe et XVIIe siècles,” *Bulletin de la Société de l’histoire du protestantisme français* 120 (1974): 323–365; Stefano Villani, “The British Invention of the Waldenses,” in *Remembering the Reformation*, ed. Alexandra Walsham et al. (London: Routledge, 2020), 192–206; Sarah Alyn Stacey and Joanna Poetz, eds., *New Perspectives on Heretical Discourse and Identities: The Waldensians in Historical Context* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021); Euan Cameron, “From the Reformation to the Past. Historical Perceptions of the Medieval Waldenses in Protestantism,” in *A Companion to the Waldenses in the Middle Ages*, ed. Marina Benedetti and Euan Cameron (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 499–534.

¹⁵Pontien Polman, *L’élément historique dans la controverse religieuse du XVIe siècle* (Gembloux: Duculot, 1932); Irena Backus, *Historical Method and Confessional Identity in the Era of the Reformation (1378–1615)* (Leiden: Brill, 2003).

¹⁶Marie-Humbert Vicaire, “Les Albigeois ancêtres des protestants. Assimilations catholiques,” in *Historiographie du catharisme* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 23–46; Guy Bedouelle, “Les Albigeois, témoins du véritable évangile: l’historiographie protestante du XVIe et du début du XVIIe siècle,” in *Historiographie du catharisme* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 47–70; Euan Cameron, “Medieval Heretics as Protestant Martyrs,” in *Martyrs and Martyrologies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 185–207; Bruce Gordon, ed., *Protestant History and Identity in Sixteenth-Century Europe*, 2 vols. (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1996); Yves Krumenacker, “La généalogie imaginaire de la Réforme protestante,” *Revue historique* 638, no. 2 (2006): 259–289; Yves Krumenacker and Wenjing Wang, “Cathares, vaudois, hussites, ancêtres de la Réforme?” *Chrétiens et sociétés. XVIe-XXIe siècles*, no. 23 (2016): 133–162; Jameson Tucker, *The Construction of Reformed Identity in Jean Crespin’s Livre des martyrs* (London: Routledge, 2019).

true Church. As visible survivors of medieval dissenters, the Waldensians occupied a privileged position in such Protestant genealogies, including those of Matthias Flacius Illyricus and Théodore de Bèze.¹⁷ The latter referred to them as “offspring of the old and purer church,” interpreting its appellation (*Valdenses* in Latin, *Vaudois* in French, and *Valdesi* in Italian) as a derivative of their inhabitation rather than Valdesius.¹⁸

In the seventeenth century, scholars working within cosmopolitan Protestant networks took a step further in constructing a unique framework for Waldensian history. Two British historians, James Ussher (1581–1656) and Samuel Morland (1625–1695), definitely traced the origin of the Waldensians back to antiquity.¹⁹ They asserted that in the early or central Middle Ages, when the papacy began to introduce pagan superstition and idolatry, the inhabitants of the alpine valleys separated themselves from the Roman church; from then on, only their church maintained the authentic liturgies, doctrines, and customs of the primitive church. Moreover, Morland posited that the true Religion retained in the Waldensian valleys was propagated outside through the dissenters such as Peter of Bruis, Henry of Toulouse, Arnold of Brescia, Valdesius, Cathars, Lollards, Hussites, Luther, and Calvin.²⁰ In a way, these authors reversed the sixteenth-century Protestant genealogy, of which the Waldensians constituted only a part, into the all-inclusive Waldensian genealogy.

Morland’s vision flowed into the Waldensian historiography through Jean Léger (1615–1670), pastor and moderator of the Waldensian churches after 1643.²¹ After the massacre of 1655, Léger went into exile in the Netherlands and published *Histoire generale des eglises evangeliques des Vallées de Piemont ou Vaudoises* (General History of the Evangelical Churches in the Valleys of Piedmont or the Waldensians, 1669).²² In this work, Léger claimed the Waldensians’ ancient origin, the schism from the Roman church in the age of Claudius of Turin, their pureness

¹⁷Matthias Flacius Illyricus, *Catalogus testium Veritatis*. . . (Basilea, 1556), 704–723; Théodore de Bèze, *Icones* (Genève: Jean de Laon, 1580), Cc. i–ii.

¹⁸de Bèze, *Icones*, Cc. i.

¹⁹James Ussher, *Gravissimae quaestionis, de Christianarum ecclesiarum, in occidentis praesertim partibus, ab apostolicis temporibus ad nostram usque aetatem, continu successione & statu, historica explicatio* (London, 1613); Samuel Morland, *The History of the Evangelical Churches of the Valleys of Piemont* (London: Henry Hills, 1658). On their researches and works, see Marina Benedetti, *Il ‘santo bottino’: circolazione di manoscritti valdesi nell’Europa del Seicento* (Torino: Claudiana, 2007); and Cameron, “From the Reformation to the Past.” The other two important works were Jean-Paul Perrin, *Histoire des Vaudois, divisée en trois parties*, 2 vols (Geneve: Matthieu Berjon, 1619) and Pierre Gilles, *Histoire ecclesiastique des Eglises Reformees*. . . (Genève, 1644). See also Yutaka Arita, “L’identite vaudoise: revolution de la legende sur leur origine depuis la Reforme jusqu’au dix-neuvieme siècle,” in *New Perspectives on Heretical Discourse and Identities: The Waldensians in Historical Context*, ed. Sarah Alyn Stacey and Joanna Poetz (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2021), 205–224.

²⁰Morland, *The History*, introduction, 8–14, 178–185.

²¹On Léger and his works, see T. G. Pons, “L’ultimo decennio della vita di Giovanni Léger e la sua ‘Storia,’” *Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi* 78, no. 107 (1960): 37–75; Daniel E. Tron, “Jean Léger e la storiografia valdese del Seicento,” *Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi*, no. 172 (1993): 82–90; Martino Laurenti, “Les Vrays Vaudois Originaires: La nascita dell’identità valligiana nelle comunità valdesi del Piemonte seicentesco,” in *Identità valdesi tra passato e presente*. atti del 55 Convegno di studi sulla Riforma e sui movimenti religiosi in Italia, Torre Pellice, 4–6 settembre 2015, ed. Susanna Peyronel Rambaldi (Torino: Claudiana, 2016), 105–132.

²²Jean Léger, *Histoire generale des eglises evangeliques des Vallées de Piemont ou Vaudoises* (Leiden: Carpentier, 1669).

in liturgies, doctrines, and customs, and their uninterrupted succession, as his friend Morland did.²³ In order to gain favor for his homeland, the ex-moderator underlined the importance of the Piemontese valleys in delivering the true Religion to such a degree that he paradoxically maintained that “if any inhabitant of the Valleys would be pagan or papist yet, this will not prevent him from being called Waldensian since it concerns his place of residence regardless of one’s faith.”²⁴ However, the way Léger traced the history of the Waldensian community and proposed the alleged genealogy of Waldensians followed his British precursors.²⁵

The widespread dissemination of these seventeenth-century works determined the subsequent narrative of and about the Waldensians in Protestant countries.²⁶ In the Valleys, almost all Waldensian historians followed the account of Morland and Léger, confirming their ancient origin and presented an imagined genealogy of Waldensian-protestants. They accused the Roman church of introducing novelty in their cult and, in turn, accented the pureness of the Waldensian church in liturgies, doctrines, and customs. Authors such as Pierre Boyer (1619–c.1700), Jacques Brez (1771–1798), Jean Rodolphe Peyran (1751–1823), Antoine Monastier (1774–1852), Amedeo Bert (1809–1883), and Alexis Muston (1810–1888), all shared a basic structure inherited from the cosmopolitan networks of protestants, even though there were variations and mutual contradictions in specifics and emphasis.²⁷ Due to their writings and the influence of their foreign colleagues, the myth of the Waldensians’ ancient origin became a common property of the European protestant churches.

III. The Waldensians in the Nineteenth Century: Confronting Italy

After short-lived freedom during the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods, the Alpine Waldensians finally achieved civil emancipation in 1848. On February 17, King Carlo Alberto recognized their citizenship, removing all restrictions imposed on their activities until then.²⁸

²³Léger, *Histoire generale*, dedicace; Premier livre, 130–137, 160–167. Claudius, Bishop of Turin (810–827) was a famous opponent to the veneration of sacred images, saints, and the cross. On him, see Pascal Boulhol, *Claude de Turin: un évêque iconoclaste dans l’occident carolingien. Etude suivie de l’édition du commentaire sur Josué* (Paris: Institut d’études augustiniennes, 2002).

²⁴Léger, *Histoire generale*, Premier livre, 17. On this aspect of his work, see Martino Laurenti, “Les Vrays Vaudois Originaires’.

²⁵Léger, *Histoire generale*, dedicace; Premier livre, 150–160; second livre, 330–351.

²⁶On the Waldensian myth after Morland and Léger in northern protestant countries, see Villani, “The British Invention of the Waldenses”; and Cameron, “From the Reformation to the Past.”

²⁷Pierre Boyer, *Abregé de l’histoire des Vaudois* (La Haye, 1691); Jacques Brez, *Histoire des Vaudois ou des habitants des vallées occidentales du Piémont. . .* (Paris: Leclerc, 1796); Jean Rodolphe Peyran, *An Historical Defence of the Waldenses or Vaudois, Inhabitants of the Valleys of Predmont*, ed. and trans. Thomas Sims (London: Rivington, 1826); Antoine Monastier, *Histoire de l’église vaudoise depuis son origine et des Vaudois de Piémont jusqu’à nos jours* (Toulouse: Tartanac, 1847); Alexis Muston, *Histoire des Vaudois des vallées du Piémont et de leurs colonies. . .* (Paris: F. G. Levrault, 1834); Alexis Muston, *L’Israël des Alpes*, 4 vols. (Paris: Librairie de Marc Ducloux, 1851); Amedeo Bert, *I Valdesi ossia i Cristiani-cattolici secondo la Chiesa primitiva, abitanti le cosi dette valli di Piemonte: cenni storici* (Torino: Gianini e Fiore, 1849).

²⁸On the promulgation of the patent, see Gian Paolo Romagnani, “Carlo Alberto e i valdesi,” in *La Bibbia, la coccarda e il tricolore: i valdesi fra due emancipazioni, 1798–1848*. Atti del XXXVII e del XXXVIII Convegno di studi sulla Riforma e sui movimenti religiosi in Italia (Torre Pellice, 31 agosto–2 settembre 1997 e 30 agosto – 1 settembre 1998), ed. Gian Paolo Romagnani (Torino: Claudiana, 2001), 285–303.

The long-awaited emancipation led the Waldensians to turn to the rest of Italy. In particular, younger pastors inspired by *Réveil* (Geneve-born Evangelical Awakening) began to embark on missionary work outside the Valleys in an effort to convert the whole peninsula.²⁹ In 1855, under their initiative, the Synod founded the Waldensian Faculty of Theology and the Claudiana publishing house at Torre Pellice.³⁰ With the expansion of the mission following unification, the former moved to first Florence in 1861 and then Rome in 1922. Of course, as we know all too well, most inhabitants of Italy remained Catholic. Nevertheless, Waldensian pastors succeeded in founding small evangelical communities throughout the peninsula, disseminating enormous numbers of books and pamphlets.³¹

However, the situation outside the Valleys did not give the Waldensians cause for optimism. The Albertine Statute, enacted in the following month of emancipation, established Catholicism as the sole state religion: it tolerated other cults but did not concede complete freedom.³² In fact, throughout the late nineteenth century, the Waldensians faced much hostility from their new fellow citizens. Some Catholics vehemently denounced the governmental decision and launched anti-Waldensian campaigns.³³ They saw any reconciliation with the Protestant and non-Italian-speaking Waldensians as a threat to the Piedmontese society, because it would result in political disunity, moral deterioration, and an increase in foreign influence.

Moreover, Waldensian missionary activities caused clashes not only with local priests but also with other Protestant churches, which had started to penetrate the country after unification. The failures of revolutions in the first half of the century drove many of its leaders to embrace Protestantism, particularly Anglo-evangelicalism.³⁴ These converts, who preferred a free church to a traditional confessional community,

²⁹On *Réveil*, see Timothy Stunt, *From Awakening to Secession Radical Evangelicals in Switzerland and Britain, 1815–35* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 2000). On its influence on the Waldensians, see Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, 115–125; Domenico Maselli, “I valdesi tra Restaurazione e Risorgimento,” in *Il protestantesimo italiano nel Risorgimento: influenze, miti, identità*. atti del LI Convegno di studi sulla Riforma e sui movimenti religiosi in Italia (Torre Pellice, settembre 2–4, 2011) (Torino: Claudiana, 2012), 47–65.

³⁰On these two institutions, see Valdo Vinay, *Facoltà Valdese di teologia 1855–1955* (Torre Pellice: Claudiana, 1955); Carlo Papini and Sara Tourn, *Claudiana, 1855–2005: catalogo storico* (Torino: Claudiana, 2005).

³¹On this subject, see Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, 300–321; Vinay, *Storia dei valdesi*, 73–179; Gabriella Solari, *Produzione e circolazione del libro evangelico nell’Italia del secondo ottocento: la casa editrice Claudiana e i circuiti popolari della stampa religiosa* (Manziana: Vecchiarelli, 1997).

³²On the liberty of religion in nineteenth-century Italy, see Eugenio F. Biagini, “Citizenship and Religion in the Italian Constitutions, 1796–1849,” *History of European Ideas* 37, no. 2 (2011): 211–217; Maurizio Isabella, “Citizens or Faithful? Religion and the Liberal Revolutions of the 1820s in Southern Europe,” *Modern Intellectual History* 12, no. 3 (2015): 555–578.

³³Paolo Cozzo, “Protestantesimo e stampa cattolica nel Risorgimento. L’Armonia’ e la polemica antiprotestante nel decennio preunitario,” *Rivista di storia e letteratura religiosa* 36, no. 1 (2000): 77–113. On the Waldensians in Sabaudian historiography of the nineteenth century, see Andrea Merlotti, “«Stranieri al Piemonte»: i valdesi nella storiografia piemontese dell’Ottocento,” in *La Bibbia, la coccarda e il tricolore*, 455–492.

³⁴Tourn, *Risorgimento e chiese cristiane*; Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*; Giorgio Spini, *L’evangelo e il berretto frigio: storia della chiesa cristiana libera in Italia: 1870–1904* (Torino: Claudiana, 1971); Domenico Maselli, *Tra risveglio e millennio: storia delle chiese cristiane dei fratelli: 1836–1886* (Torino: Claudiana, 1974); Domenico Maselli, *Libertà della parola: storia delle chiese cristiane dei Fratelli, 1886–1946* (Torino: Claudiana, 1978).

saw the Waldensians as obsolete, half-Catholic, and foreign, “without knowing Italian customs and costumes, without comprehending nor correctly speaking our language.”³⁵ Numerous missionaries from England, the United States, and Germany only complicated the circumstance.³⁶ Repeated attempts to unite and establish a national Protestant church in Italy had been unsuccessful.³⁷

In response to attacks from other confessions and denominations, Waldensian intellectuals resorted to their most familiar weapon: history. The day after emancipation, pastor Amedeo Bert (1809–1883) published *I Valdesi ossia i Cristiani-cattolici secondo la Chiesa primitiva* (*The Waldensians or the Catholic Christians According to the Primitive Church*, 1849) in order to present their church to the new fellow citizens.³⁸ In 1851, Alexis Muston (1810–1888), who would later become the first honorary president of the *Société d’Histoire Vaudoise*, detailed the course of the Alpine Waldensian history in *L’Israël des Alpes* (*The Israel of the Alps*).³⁹ In 1861, just after the unification, another zealous pastor with a revolutionary mind, Paolo Geymonat (1827–1907) defended their ancient origin, authentic faith, and the cause for the Italian mission.⁴⁰ Even though all these works ended up repeating the traditional narrative of their past always in the same scheme, it is significant that two of them were written no longer in French, but in Italian. Some compatriots and foreign Protestants, accepting their claims, enthusiastically supported them.⁴¹

However, during the nineteenth century, the scholarly attitude toward the Waldensian myth became increasingly critical.⁴² In addition to the polemics by the erudite clergies of the Roman church, nascent modern philology and a positivistic approach revealed that no sources supported the existence of the Waldensians before the late twelfth century.⁴³ Furthermore, although many Waldensians persisted in

³⁵*Principii della Chiesa Romana, della Chiesa Protestante e della Chiesa Cristiana* (Torino, 1863), 23. Although published anonymously, scholars agreed to assume Pietro Teodolico Rossetti as the author. On confessional conflicts, see Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, 280–287, 303–309.

³⁶Danilo Raponi, *Religion and Politics in the Risorgimento: Britain and the New Italy, 1861–1875*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014; Andrea Annese, “From Risorgimento and Reform to Wesley and Revival: Methodist Strategies in Post-Unitary Italy, 1861–1890,” *Wesley and Methodist Studies* 12, no. 1 (2020): 29–46.

³⁷Giorgio Spini, *L’evangelo e il berretto frigio*; Vinay, *Storia dei valdesi*, 311–318.

³⁸Bert, *I Valdesi ossia i Cristiani-cattolici*. See also Eugenio F. Biagini, “La nazione sinodale: patria e libertà nella retorica protestante italiana, 1848–1866,” in *Il protestantesimo italiano nel Risorgimento: influenze, miti, identità*. atti del LI Convegno di studi sulla Riforma e sui movimenti religiosi in Italia (Torre Pellice, settembre 2–4, 2011) (Torino: Claudiana, 2012), 89–111.

³⁹Muston, *L’Israël des Alpes*. The society changed its name to the Italian form only in 1933.

⁴⁰Paolo Geymonat, *Gli evangelici valdesi* (Firenze: Tip. Torelli, 1861). On him, see Thomas Van Den End, *Paolo Geymonat e il movimento evangelico in Italia nella seconda metà del secolo XIX* (Torino: Claudiana, 1969).

⁴¹For example, Alessandro Borella, “I Valdesi. Cenni storici di Amedeo Bert ministero del culto valdese,” *Gazzetta del popolo*, December 4, 1849; Jane Louisa Willyams, *A Short History of the Waldensian Church in the Valleys of Piedmont: From the Earliest Period to the Present Time* (London: J. Nisbet, 1855); Steven Blaupot Ten Cate, “Historical Inquiry into the Waldensian Origin of the Dutch Baptists,” *The Southern Baptist Review and Eclectic* 1, no. 3–4 (1857): 331–362, 481–501 (Translated from Dutch); “The Waldensian Church,” *The Church Monthly*, November 1862. The last article was reproduced in *The Evangelical Repository and United Presbyterian Review* and *The Christian World*.

⁴²On early modern attacks on the myth, see Raymond Darricau, “De l’histoire théologique à la grande érudition: Bossuet (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles),” in *Historiographie du catharisme* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 85–117.

⁴³André Charvaz, *Recherches historiques sur la véritable origine des Vaudois et sur le caractère de leurs doctrines primitives* (Paris: Perisse frères, 1836); Émile Cavalier, *Essai sur l’origine des Vaudois* (Toulouse:

their mythical past, even within their community a critical voice emerged. It was none other than the voice of Emilio Comba. In 1877, Comba, a professor of church history of the Faculty, published his first article on the subject. Examining recent surveys from non-Waldensian authors and admitting their validity, he claimed that the Waldensians originated in twelfth-century Lyon, not in the primitive church.⁴⁴ He repeated his conclusion in *Valdo ed i Valdesi avanti la riforma* (*Valdesius and the Waldensians before Reformation*, 1880), which was welcomed by scholars abroad but received extreme hostility in the Valleys.⁴⁵ However, by the end of the nineteenth century, many Waldensians seemed to abandon the myth and accepted their medieval origin.⁴⁶

Therefore, at first sight, Comba appeared as a historian who embraced modern scientific methodology and departed from the confessional understanding of the past. However, things are not so simple. As a spokesman of the Waldensians in the Italian and international public spheres, Comba shared the same concern as Bert, Geymonat, and Muston. He, too, had to confront the relationship between the Italian nation and his church, and his weapon was again historical writings. The last section will investigate Comba's works on Italy's national past. However, we must first turn to his idea about contemporary Italy.

IV. Emilio Comba: Pastor and Historian Aspiring for Religious Reform

Emilio Comba was born in 1839 in San Germano Chisone, a small village in Piedmont, to a parish teacher. After completing his primary and middle school education in the Valleys, in 1859, young Emilio was sent to *Oratoire Théologique* in Geneva, which was one of the most important centers for the *Réveil* from the beginning of the nineteenth century. Like many other pastors of his generation, Comba welcomed its missionary spirit and emphasis on interior faith. During this Swiss period, he received long-term influence from three scholars: Alexandre Vinet (1797–1847), who advocated the principles of liberalism, particularly the separation of state and church; Edgar Quinet (1803–1875), a French exile and historian of religions who theorized the complementarity of political and religious revolutions; and Jean-Henri Merle d'Aubigne (1794–1872), a professor of *Oratoire* and a prominent historian of the Reformation, who invited Comba to conduct historical research.⁴⁷

Upon his return from Geneva in 1863, Comba embarked on his missionary career, serving in Perugia, Guastalla, and Brescia before being assigned to Venice in 1867.⁴⁸ His was a brief but not a tranquil enterprise. Uncompromising Comba often found himself

Bonnal et Gibrac), 1857; Pius Melia, *The Origin, Persecutions and Doctrines of the Waldenses* (London: J. Toovey, 1870).

⁴⁴Emilio Comba, "Lezione sulla origine de' Valdesi," *La Rivista Cristiana* 5 (1877): 353–363, 385–391, 425–429, 465–478.

⁴⁵Emilio Comba, *Valdo ed i Valdesi avanti la riforma* (Firenze: Claudiana, 1880). On foreign responses, for example, see Karl Müller's review appeared in *Historische Zeitschrift* 47, no. 3 (1882): 498–500. As for the critics from his fellow Waldensians, see *Témoïn*, 6 (1880), 411–412, 425–426, 226–228, 368–369; *Ibid.* 7 (1881), 16–17, 24–26, 31–32, 46–48, 55–57, 71–72, 79–80, 94–95, 102–104, 111–113, 119–121, 135–137, 143–144, 151–153; Emilio Comba, "Origine de' Valdesi," *La Rivista Cristiana* 10 (1882): 25–29, 96–105, 200–206, 227–237, 270–272, 400–402.

⁴⁶For examples, see "Programme de La Société," *Bulletin de La Société d'histoire Vaudoise* 1 (1884): 6–8.

⁴⁷Biagetti, *Emilio Comba (1839–1904)*, 24–27; Spini, *Italia liberale e protestanti*, 126–131.

⁴⁸Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, 323–326.

in conflicts with local priests, including a bishop of Perugia, Gioacchino Pecci.⁴⁹ It was during such clashes that he began to compose polemical and scholarly writings.⁵⁰

In 1872, Comba was appointed professor of church history at the Waldensian Faculty of Theology in Florence by the Synod, and he subsequently withdrew from his missionary work, making historical research and public activities his primary focus. In the Florentine atmosphere, he made friends with some leading intellectuals of his age, including Pasquale Villari, Felice Tocco, and Raffaele Mariano.⁵¹ Furthermore, as a representative of the Waldensian church, Comba interacted with other Protestant churches, sometimes on an international level.⁵²

However, it was toward promoting a “religious reform” of the Italian nation that Comba directed his greater effort.⁵³ Right after arriving in Florence, the new professor collaborated with two colleagues and founded the monthly journal *Rivista Cristiana* (1873–1887, 1893–1921), in which he published numerous articles, book reviews, and critiques on contemporary issues.⁵⁴ Although Comba sought the journal to be interconfessional and cosmopolitan and invited a wide range of submissions, the program, written in the name of editors but with the unmistakable color of Comba, delivered its nationalistic ambition in a ringing tone.⁵⁵

After the first moment of astonishment and rejoicing had passed, examining the building we had just completed with an attentive eye, many began to say that there were not just a few things inside to be renovated. Or, something like this: We have made Italy, now we must make Italians. Making Italians: This is the task for all those who want the nation to be great and strong. . . Our civil and political Risorgimento will be nothing more than the flower of the coat of arms or a wind running away, if a thorough reformation in customs, education, and discipline does not accompany it, and if we lack the strength to advance to moral greatness. . . It is from this twofold event, one divine and another human, of the moral liberty conquered for us on the Calvary and of the political liberty proclaimed from Campidoglio that the present generation must depart to acquire their greater

⁴⁹Biagetti, *Emilio Comba (1839–1904)*, 30.

⁵⁰See Aja Soggin Vöchting, “Bibliografia degli scritti di Emilio Comba,” *Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi* 118 (1965): 79–113.

⁵¹Biagetti, *Emilio Comba (1839–1904)*, 46. On the faculty and Florentine protestants, see Vinay, *Facoltà Valdese di teologia 1855–1955*; Spini, *Risorgimento e protestanti*, 326–330; Spini, *Italia liberale e protestanti*, 105–149; Stefano Gagliano, ed., *Il protestantesimo italiano negli anni di Firenze capitale: atti del Convegno promosso dall’Associazione Piero Guicciardini*: Firenze, 21 ottobre 2016 (Milano: Biblion, 2018).

⁵²Biagetti, *Emilio Comba (1839–1904)*, 58–71; Vinay, *Storia dei valdesi*, 260–265.

⁵³The Italian word “riforma” could be translated either as reform (in a general sense) or Reformation. When Comba used the phrase “riforma religiosa,” he was referring to the previous meaning: reform of a religious part of the Italian nation alongside political and social reforms. However, it should be noted that the term would have constantly reminded readers of the protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century, to which he always referred as “la Riforma.”

⁵⁴On the journal, see Emiliana Ricciarelli, “La ‘Rivista cristiana,’” *Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi* 113 (1996): 74–87. The other editors were Geymonat and Albert Revel (1837–1888). Revel apparently shared Comba’s vision of religious reform in Italy; however, he passed away before articulating his idea fully. On him, we lack a comprehensive study yet. See Spini, *Italia liberale e protestanti*, 123–126.

⁵⁵Comba repeated similar appeal in various places, sometimes in the same sentence. See, for example, Emilio Comba, “Bisogna fare gli italiani,” *L’eco della verità* 8 (1870): 27; *Storia della Riforma in Italia narrato col sussidio di nuovi documenti* (Firenze: Tipi dell’Arte della Stampa, 1881); “Cristo e l’Italia,” *L’Italia Evangelica* 1 (1881): 2.

good. . . Our purpose is indeed a positive one. In the face of the negations of a certain philosophy and Papism's prejudices and errors, the exposition of Christian truths will give rise to various apologetic and polemical writings.⁵⁶

As an enthusiastic admirer of Camillo Cavour, Comba willingly embraced the Italian nation-state and the principles of his moderate liberalism. However, what the Waldensian pastor envisioned as a nation was not secular solidarity. Despite the *Réveil*-originated comprehension of the Christian religion as an internal faith, Comba always assumed that the Italian nation should have a religious foundation; if not, its society would be destined to lack morality and fall into corruption, no matter how politically stable it seemed.⁵⁷ Based on this premise, Comba judged that unification alone was insufficient for Italy. During his mission, he saw how the Roman church's hegemony had deeply penetrated Italian society. Consequently, he concluded that it was imperative to eliminate this hegemony to realize a complete freedom of conscience of the Italian nation. Citing the famous phrase attributed to Massimo d'Azeglio, Comba declared that the ultimate goal of Risorgimento was a religious reform of the Italians and realizing such reform was inseparably connected to nation-building.

Comba drew inspiration for his vision of religious reform mainly from Edgar Quinet.⁵⁸ The French republican and historian of religions insisted in his works from the 1830s that the religious revolution always preceded the political one in the course of human progress; Quinet believed that the French revolution ultimately failed to realize true national liberty since it could not overthrow Roman Catholicism (as the Italians of the sixteenth century could not).⁵⁹ Comba took this idea of historical complementarity between the two revolutions, albeit in a different manner than the French scholar. Whereas Quinet delineated the history of religions as the development of liberty in the history of humanity, Comba remained confidently within Christianity. The Waldensian pastor was convinced that the reform would not establish a new religion but restore an original and pure religion of Christ.

As did Quinet, but from his Christian perspective, Comba always connected religious reform to history: it would be a historical event in both a "Christian and national" sense, on the one hand, and an end to be achieved through history, or historical past, on the other.⁶⁰ The article in 1887, "About the anticlerical movement in which it is shown how the love of our liberties obliges us to contemplate the necessity of religious reform," which upheld the liberty of religion and conscience against some fanatical adversary of the Roman Church, demonstrated plainly his conviction.⁶¹

Firstly, Comba placed his reform of the Italian nation within the universal history of Christianity. Like many early modern Protestant authors, he asserted that the original

⁵⁶*La Rivista Cristiana* 1 (1873): 3–5.

⁵⁷Earlier, he defined society as a church in a general sense. Emilio Comba, *La questione religiosa discorso di Emilio Comba* (Venezia: G. Grimaldo, 1869), 45.

⁵⁸On Quinet, see François Furet, *La gauche et la Revolution française au milieu du XIXe siècle: Edgar Quinet et la question du jacobinisme (1865–1870)* (Paris: Hachette, 1986); Sophie Guermès and Brigitte Krulic, eds., *Edgar Quinet, une conscience européenne* (Bruxelles: Peter Lang, 2018).

⁵⁹See, for example, Edgar Quinet, 'De l'avenir des religions', *Revue des Deux Mondes* 3/4 (1831): 213–220; *Le Christianisme et la révolution française* (Paris, 1845); *Les révolutions d'Italie* 2 vols. (Paris: Chamerot, 1848/53); *La Révolution*, II (Paris: Lacroix, 1865), 132–180.

⁶⁰*La Rivista Cristiana* 1 (1873): 5.

⁶¹Emilio Comba, "A proposito del movimento anticlericale in cui si dimostra come l'amore alle nostre libertà ci costringe a considerare la necessità di una riforma religiosa," *La Rivista cristiana* 14 (1886): 243–258.

form of the religion of Christ was pure, simple, and based solely on the Bible; it was the Roman emperors and popes who distorted this authentic form by introducing superstitious doctrines and practices. Comba interpreted this process in terms of liberty, considering the persecution of paganism as the first deviance:

Christianization by violence had, in fact, the effect not of destroying the pagan errors at their roots, but of introducing them into the church. . . Theodosius, Charlemagne, two Fredericks, Napoleon, and more than them, the papal monarchy continued the old pagan tradition, which still threatens from time to time to submerge in its impure current the most beautiful water of liberalism.⁶²

Yet, the three events contributed to renovating Christianity, eliminating little by little pagan contamination: the Reformation, the French Revolution, and the Risorgimento. “Where is the seed of our liberty? It is in the Gospel of Christ. And the tree? The Reformation. And the branch from which we pick it? The French Revolution. Who among us first extended his hand and presented it in the form of laws to our generation? Count Camillo Cavour.”⁶³ For the Waldensian pastor, a causal link existed between them. In such an account, the coming religious reform in Italy would assume both a national and somewhat eschatological role, fulfilling the original Gospel teachings and the national Risorgimento at the same time.

Secondly, Comba assigned the historical past an essential role in realizing a religious reform of the nation—providing educational examples. For him, “making Italians signified educating them.”⁶⁴ However, as noted above, the Waldensian pastor rejected any coercive means in religious policy, even those against the Roman church; he opposed public education should engage with religious matters.⁶⁵ “The State is not atheist; the State is separate from the Church; therefore, it declares itself incapable of teaching religious matters. That is all.”⁶⁶ He believed any violent oppression or imposition was contrary to both the Gospel and the principle of liberalism. Therefore, the only way to promote religious reform was through education via history. The past offered examples. “Examples are the first and indispensable lesson of morals. They are the morals in action.”⁶⁷

On various occasions, Comba manifested his attitude toward the past, *Historia magistra vitae*. His first article on *Rivista cristiana* in 1873, which presented a sixteenth-century reformer, opened by emphasizing that honoring the memory of their martyrs was a duty for every civilized people.⁶⁸ His first general work on the Reform movements in Italy, *Storia della Riforma in Italia* (1881), expressed the same concern. Highlighting contemporary interest for “posing a new foundation to commune education,” it

⁶²Comba, “A proposito del movimento anticlericale,” 251. Two Fredericks referred to the Holy Roman emperors Frederick I Barbarossa (1122–90) and Frederick II (1194–1250).

⁶³Comba, “A proposito del movimento anticlericale,” 255.

⁶⁴Comba, “Bisogna fare gli italiani.”

⁶⁵It was another significant point that separated him and Quinet. Here Comba criticized the latter’s opinion that the French Revolution should have resorted to violent means to dismantle the Roman church. See Quinet, *Le Christianisme et la révolution française*, 303–358; *La Révolution*, II, 173–174; Comba, “A proposito del movimento anticlericale,” 250–251, 255–257.

⁶⁶Comba, “A proposito del movimento anticlericale,” 252.

⁶⁷Ibid., 253.

⁶⁸Emilio Comba, “Girolamo Galateo Martire Veneziano,” *Rivista Cristiana* 1 (1873): 18.

declared, “history can be a teacher of life: who narrates it does the work of faith and science at the same time.”⁶⁹

As a matter of fact, Comba was far from alone in advocating such a vision of reform. Many of his contemporaries shared his judgment on contemporary society and accused the Roman church of being responsible for Italy’s moral decadence. According to widespread cliché, it was the absence or failure of the Reformation in the sixteenth century that delayed the modernization of Mediterranean countries; the Counter-Reformation increased only clerical control on society and deprived the Catholic nations of its vitality.⁷⁰ Furthermore, the 1864 Syllabus, which condemned liberalism, separation of church and state, and freedom of religion with many other “modern” principles, and the First Vatican Council led even moderate thinkers to conclude that Roman church had lost its historical role.⁷¹ Therefore, intellectuals of liberal Italy sought an alternative to Catholicism that could serve as a new basis for national unity: some turned their eyes to idealistic philosophies, and others looked to Protestant churches.

For advocates of religious reform in Italy, separating the national past from the Roman church was of vital importance. For one thing, they had to counter some protestant scholars who boasted the superiority of their nation for cultivating the Reformation. For another, they looked up to the past dissenters as forerunners of their own attempts. Pasquale Villari worked on Savonarola together with the Florentine Neo-Piagnoni; Bertrando Spaventa, a leader of the Neapolitan Hegelians, on Bruno and Campanella; his student and Neo-Kantian Felice Tocco on medieval heretics and again on Bruno; Piero Guicciardini collected a vast amount of historical documents concerning the sixteenth-century reformers.⁷²

However, Comba’s vision and historiography still occupied a unique position in this milieu, where the hopes for religious reform and historical research were strongly interconnected. Instead of finding a turning point in the national past, Comba sought to present continuity in the history of the Italian nation: the continuity based on its inherent

⁶⁹Comba, *Storia della Riforma in Italia*, III–IV.

⁷⁰Stefania Biagetti, *Il mito della “Riforma italiana” nella storiografia dal XVI al XIX secolo* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 2007); Cesare Mozzarelli, “Eterna o colpevole: tre schede ottocentesche sull’invenzione dell’identità italiana fra classicità e cattolicesimo,” in *Identità italiana e cattolicesimo: una prospettiva storica*, ed. Cesare Mozzarelli (Roma: Carocci, 2003), 19–45; Giuseppe Cospito, “Il dibattito sulla mancata Riforma protestante nell’Italia del primo Novecento,” *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 97, no. 1 (2018): 130–156.

⁷¹Guido Verucci, “Le ‘due Italie.’ Il giudizio sul cattolicesimo italiano nella cultura laica,” in *La Chiesa e l’Italia: per una storia dei loro rapporti negli ultimi due secoli*, ed. Antonio Acerbi (Milano: Vita e Pensiero, 2003), 153–94; Martin Papenheim, “Roma o Morte: Culture Wars in Italy,” in *Culture Wars: Secular-Catholic Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, ed. Christopher Clark and Wolfram Kaiser (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 202–226.

⁷²On Villari, see Mauro Moretti, “La storiografia italiana e la cultura del secondo ottocento. preliminari ad uno studio su Pasquale Villari,” *Giornale critico della filosofia italiana* 1, no. 3 (1981): 300–372; Maria Fubini Leuzzi, “Il “Savonarola” di Pasquale Villari e la storiografia italiana postunitaria. Note introduttive alla lettura dell’opera,” *Archivio Storico Italiano* 164, no. 2 (2006): 267–301. On Neapolitan Hegelians, see Fernanda Gallo, *Dalla patria allo Stato: Bertrando Spaventa, una biografia intellettuale* (Roma: Laterza, 2012); Fernanda Gallo and Axel Körner, eds., “Hegel in Italy: Risorgimento Political Thought in Transnational Perspective” special issue, *Journal of Modern Italian Studies* 24, no. 2 (2019). On Guicciardini, Lorenza Giorgi and Massimo Rubboli, eds., *Piero Guicciardini 1808–1886: un riformatore religioso nell’Europa dell’ottocento*: atti del Convegno di studi Firenze, 11–12 aprile 1986 (Firenze: Olschki, 1988). See also Giorgio Cracco, “Eresiologi d’Italia tra Otto e Novecento,” *Bollettino della Società di Studi Valdesi* 174 (1994): 16–38.

and permanent Christian character. While Quinet and some Neapolitan philosophers emphasized the historical significance of the Renaissance as an awakening of reason and individuality, Comba expressed certain reservations about it.⁷³ He believed that although the Renaissance brought about the necessary condition of the Reformation, it was reborn of pagan culture associated with the corruption of the papacy; moreover, the Italian nation demonstrated its genius even before. The last section will show how Comba's vision and discourse were interconnected with the historiographical framework constructed within the early modern Protestant networks.

V. From Confessional Myth to National History

Emilio Comba became involved in historical research while working in Venice. In 1867, the archive at Fluri opened to the public, and there Comba encountered the records of the Roman Inquisition, which contained numerous traits of the "reformers" persecuted as heretics in early modern Veneto. Throughout his life, the Waldensian pastor worked on editing and publishing those documents, some of which resulted in eight volumes of "Library of the Reformation in Italy: A collection of the evangelical writings in the sixteenth century."⁷⁴ Also, Comba worked on the history of Waldensians, as noted in section II. Here, we will limit our analysis to his two major works on Italian Reformations: *Storia della Riforma in Italia* (1881) and *I nostri protestanti* (1895/1897).

In both works, Comba employed the concept of "Reform" and "Protestants" in a broader sense, extending their application beyond the sixteenth-century movements. *Storia*, planned as the first volume of a projected series, covered the history of Christianity in Italy only up to the fifteenth century, portraying it as a constant conflict between good and evil, or popes and reformers. Comba began his story from the acceptance of Christianity in the eternal capital of the Empire. He described how the early bishops of Rome, striving to establish a stable and united community, incorporated too much of the Roman tradition into the Religion.⁷⁵ Since the eternal city lacked elect people who could read and understand the Bible, the bishops were unable to preserve the original form of the Religion. Instead, "the concept of the Christian religion Romans formed was quickly adulterated, both by the influence of Judaism and the effect of political traditions."⁷⁶ Christian Emperors accelerated this trend and brought about further corruption: emerged penances, indulgences, purgatory, suffrages for the dead, monastic orders, and all things foreign to the original Religion.⁷⁷ Following such a vision, the Waldensian historian recounted ongoing transformations of the Roman church and the contestation arising in each period. Obviously, for him, the latter represented reform movements in Italy and "the most beautiful current of our Christian tradition."⁷⁸ Reformers all preserved the purest

⁷³See Philip Schaff and Emilio Comba, *Il rinascimento e la riforma - Gli ostacoli alla riforma in Italia* (Firenze: Bonducciana, 1891). Despite his close relationship with Villari, Tocco, and Mariano, Comba did not have high esteem for Kant or Hegel, whom he appeared to judge as too far from the Gospel. Moreover, he considered the Neapolitan Hegelians to be mere followers of the German philosopher and did not fully appreciate the originality of their ideas. See, for example, Emilio Comba, "Rivista della stampa," *La Rivista cristiana* 13 (1885): 378–385.

⁷⁴Emilio Comba, ed., *Biblioteca della riforma italiana: raccolta di scritti evangelici del secolo XV*, 8 vols (Roma: Claudiana, 1883–86).

⁷⁵Comba, *Storia della Riforma in Italia*, 3–7, 46, 68–72.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, 47.

⁷⁷*Ibid.*, 75.

⁷⁸*Ibid.*, 47.

form of the Christian religion, immune to the novelty introduced by successive popes. Here, like early modern Protestant historians, Comba exalted their faith in negative terms.

It is striking that in *Storia*, Comba focused on the historical development of the Roman papacy instead of the succession of reformers. Indeed, he considered each resistance to the papacy as a reaction to its metamorphosis and therefore offered no unifying factor for his reformers, except their adherence to the Gospel. Although all of them opposed the papacy, they fought different battles in each case, as he repeatedly maintained. Consequently, Comba had no choice but to describe the development of the papacy as the driving force of history. Paradoxically, in terms of its subject and narrative structure, this work resembles, much more than the traditional Waldensian historiography, Cesare Cantù's *Gli Eretici d'Italia* (The Heretics of Italy, 1865–1866), which chronicled the history of Italy as a process of overcoming heresy by the papacy.⁷⁹ Presumably, this unintended similarity was one of the reasons Comba did not publish the announced subsequent volume.

Comba proposed a solution to this dilemma in *I nostri protestanti*, for which he projected three volumes.⁸⁰ Even though his sudden death in 1904 left the final volume incomplete, fortunately, the two published books sufficiently conveyed his historical vision.

In the fifteen years separating the two works, the prospect of Italy becoming Protestant was diminishing: the heroic era of missionaries came to an end; almost all leaders and parliamentary representatives of Italian Protestantism had gradually passed away; additionally, under Pope Leo XIII the Roman church began to regain lost ground.⁸¹ At the ninth International Conference of the Evangelical Alliance held in Florence in 1891, Comba and other protestant pastors had to admit the general failure of their mission.⁸² He reiterated his lament in the introduction of the first volume of *I nostri protestanti*, writing that the current situation did not reach the promise held by the French Revolution and Risorgimento.⁸³

Still, Comba remained committed to his conviction that the Italian nation had an inherent protestant nature. While he pretended to continue his “voluminous and a little outdated” *Storia*, the new work primarily reflected sense of urgency rather than advancements in his research.

The work consists of a series of biographies of those whom he referred to as “Our Protestants.” The chapters of volume I were dedicated to Hermas (The unspecified author of *The Shepherd of Hermas*); Hippolytus of Rome (c. 170–c. 235)⁸⁴; Novatian

⁷⁹Cesare Cantù, *Gli eretici d'Italia: discorsi storici*, 3 vols. (Torino: Unione Tipografico-editrice, 1865–1866).

⁸⁰Emilio Comba, *I nostri protestanti, I. Avanti la riforma* (Firenze: Claudiana, 1895); Emilio Comba, *I nostri protestanti, II. Durante la riforma nel Veneto e nell'Istria* (Firenze: Claudiana, 1897).

⁸¹Spini, *Italia liberale e protestanti*, 85–87. On the Catholic church, see Francesco Traniello, *Religione cattolica e stato nazionale: dal Risorgimento al secondo dopoguerra* (Bologna: Il mulino, 2007); John Francis Pollard, *Catholicism in Modern Italy: Religion, Society and Politics since 1861* (London: Routledge, 2014).

⁸²Philip Schaff and Emilio Comba, *Il rinascimento e la riforma—Gli ostacoli alla riforma in Italia* (Firenze: Bonducciana, 1891).

⁸³Comba, *I nostri protestanti*, I, XI. On his view on the mission's general failure, expressed four years earlier, see Schaff and Comba, *Il rinascimento e la riforma - Gli ostacoli alla riforma in Italia.*, 48–59.

⁸⁴Theologian and the first antipope. On him, see Allen Brent, *Hippolytus and the Roman Church in the Third Century: Communities in Tension before the Emergence of a Monarch-Bishop* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

(c. 200–258)⁸⁵; Jovinian (active at the end of the fourth century)⁸⁶; Claudius of Turin; Arnold of Brescia (c. 1090–1155)⁸⁷; Valdesius; Joachim of Fiore (1135–1202)⁸⁸; Dolcino of Novara (active between 1300–1307)⁸⁹; Dante Alighieri (1265–1321); Marsilius of Padua (c. 1275–c.1340), and Girolamo Savonarola (1452–1498). Volume II focused on the early modern reformers in the Veneto region⁹⁰: Girolamo Galateo (c. 1490–1541)⁹¹; Bartolomeo Fonzio (c. 1502–1562)⁹²; Antonio Brucioli (c. 1498–1566)⁹³; Giulio della Rovere (1504–1581)⁹⁴; Baldassare Altieri (died c. 1550)⁹⁵; Pietro Speziali (1478–1554)⁹⁶; Francesco Spiera (1502–1548)⁹⁷; Francesco Negri (1500–1563)⁹⁸; Baldo Lupetino (1502/3–1556)⁹⁹; Matthias Flacius Illyricus (1520–1575); Pier Paolo Vergerio (1500–1565)¹⁰⁰; Tiziano (active in the sixteenth century)¹⁰¹; Francesco della Sega (died in 1565)¹⁰²; Giulio Gherlandi (died in 1562)¹⁰³; Antonio Rizzetto (died in 1565);¹⁰⁴ and Fedele Vigo (active in the sixteenth century).¹⁰⁵ The third should have concerned reformers in the modern period.

⁸⁵Theologian and perhaps the second antipope between 251 and 258. On him, see James L. Papandrea, *Novatian of Rome and the Culmination of Pre-Nicene Orthodoxy* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2011).

⁸⁶An opponent of monasticism. On him, see David G. Hunter, *Marriage, Celibacy and Heresy in Ancient Christianity: The Jovinianist Controversy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

⁸⁷Church reformer. On him, see Grado Giovanni Merlo, *Eretici ed eresie medievali*, 2nd ed. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2011), 38–44.

⁸⁸Theologian famous for his apocalyptic theory. On him, see Matthias Riedl, ed., *A Companion to Joachim of Fiore* (Leiden: Brill, 2017).

⁸⁹A second leader of a dissent group called *Apostoli*. On him, see Raniero Orioli, *Venit perfidus heresi-archa: il movimento apostolico-dolciniano* (Roma: Istituto storico italiano per il Medio Evo, 1988).

⁹⁰On these less noted figures, see in general Aldo Stella, *Anabattismo e antitrinitarismo in Italia nel XVI secolo. Nuove ricerche storiche* (Padova: Liviana, 1969); Gaetano Cozzi and Giuseppe Gullino, eds., *La Chiesa di venezia tra riforma protestante e riforma cattolica* (Venezia: Edizioni Studium Cattolico Veneziano, 1990); Massimo Firpo, *Riforma protestante ed eresie nell'Italia del Cinquecento: un profilo storico* (Bari: Laterza, 1993); Aldo Stella, *Dall'anabattismo veneto al 'Socialevangélismo' dei fratelli hutteriti e all'illuminismo religioso sociniano* (Roma: Herder, 1996); Salvatore Caponetto, *La Riforma protestante nell'Italia del Cinquecento*, 2nd ed. (Torino: Claudiana, 1997); Luca Addante, *Eretici e libertini nel Cinquecento italiano* (Roma: Laterza, 2010).

⁹¹Friar minor condemned with heretical opinion. On Galateo and Fonzio, see also Jurij Bardini, "Quella maledetta nidiata. Frati minori conventuali perseguiti per eresia agli inizi del Cinquecento," *Il Santo. Rivista francescana di storia, dottrina e arte* 47 (2007): 451–480.

⁹²Friar minor converted to Protestantism.

⁹³Florentine Humanist famous for the translation of the Bible into Italian. On him, see also Élise Boillet, ed., *Antonio Brucioli: humanisme et évangélisme entre Réforme et Contre-Réforme: actes du colloque de Tours, 20–21 mai 2005* (Paris: Champion, 2008).

⁹⁴Augustinian Friar converted to Protestantism.

⁹⁵Venetian Protestant.

⁹⁶Venetian Humanist and poet.

⁹⁷Paduan Protestant.

⁹⁸Paduan Calvinist and later an Antitrinitarian.

⁹⁹Friar minor embraced the Reformation. Uncle-in-law of Matthias Flacius Illyricus.

¹⁰⁰Protestant reformer. On him, see also Anne Jacobson Schutte, *Pier Paolo Vergerio e la riforma a Venezia: 1498–1549* (Roma: Il Veltro, 1988); and Robert A. Pierce, *Pier Paolo Vergerio the Propagandist* (Roma: Storia e letteratura, 2003).

¹⁰¹A leader of Italian Anabaptists.

¹⁰²Antitrinitarian.

¹⁰³Antitrinitarian.

¹⁰⁴Antitrinitarian.

¹⁰⁵Anabaptist. On him, see also, Federica Ambrosini, *Storie di patrizi e di eresia nella Venezia del '500* (Milano: FrancoAngeli, 1999).

In *I nostri protestanti*, Comba offered a history of Italy in a manner that we may call Manichean. He opened the first volume with a provocative question: is Italy pagan or Christian? And he replied to himself: both, it had both characters.¹⁰⁶ Italy was pagan as well as Christian, and these two aspects continued to compete against each other. In Comba's discourses, pagan Italy referred not only to the Roman Empire or popular culture but also to the papacy, which inherited many non-Christian practices from the pagan culture: those elements alien to the original Religion of Christ constantly grew within the Roman church, transforming it into the representative of the pagan aspect of Italy.¹⁰⁷ However, Italy never lacked its Christian heroes, who continuously contested the papacy, delivering the pure Gospel of Christ.

Against the legend of the papal apostolic tradition, a tradition of free martyrs who passed on the living light in the nighttime was formed. "Like relay runners, they carried the living light." They were not bound to one another like a chain. Rather, when we see that "when one is defeated, the others soon follow," we are inclined to believe that there was a spiritual lineage. They have existed at every point in Italian history: in ancient times against the emerging papacy, in the Middle Ages against the megalomaniacal papacy, and in modern times against the corrupting papacy. The seeds they sow will blossom. Because of their example, faith in the truth will never die.¹⁰⁸

Here, Comba managed to provide a historical substance to the successive opponents of the papacy by identifying them as a Christian part of the Italian nation. In fact, the definition Comba gave to their religion hardly changed: he described them as pure, simple, faithful to the Gospel, and immune to pagan contamination; as far as antiquity and the Middle Ages were concerned, *Storia* and *I nostri protestanti* often discussed the same reformers. However, by ensuring their historical continuity in the form of national genealogy, Comba led his Protestants to acquire a genealogical linkage without needing to invent any direct relationship or mutual influence between them, and these heroes guaranteed in turn the historical continuity of the Italian nation with its Protestant element. In such an arrangement, the nation and its Protestants relied on each other in boasting of their long-standing existence.

We will readily recognize that Comba was recasting here the genealogy of the Protestant-Waldensian church, a product of the early modern confessional conflicts, into the national history of Christian Italy. As a predecessor of his endeavor, he named Mathius Flacius Illiricus and his *Catalogus testimonium veritatis*.¹⁰⁹ Like this famous precedent and many other Waldensian historians, Comba consistently emphasized how his protagonists defended the Religion of Christ against the tyrannical papacy. When the Roman church introduced some pagan or artificially invented practices, they refuted those novelties, bearing persecutions and sometimes suffering martyrdom. They proved the existence of the true Christian religion prior to Luther. Moreover, Comba's list included many familiar figures in early modern Waldensian canons, such as Claudius, Arnold, Valdesius, and Savonarola.

¹⁰⁶Comba, *I nostri protestanti*, I, V–VI.

¹⁰⁷Ibid., 3–22.

¹⁰⁸Ibid., VII–VIII.

¹⁰⁹Ibid., IX. See also Comba, *I nostri protestanti*, II, 372–381.

Still, the national genealogy of *I nostri protestanti* was far from a mere reproduction of the early modern Waldensian historiography: in his attempt to transform a confessional narrative into a national one, Comba substantially modified the composition of the traditional Waldensian catalog. He removed some recurring characters such as Berengar of Tour, Peter of Bruis, Henry of Toulouse, Wycliff with Lollards, and Huss while inserting new figures on their behalf: Dante, Marsilius, Dolcino, and many reformers in the sixteenth century, including Anabaptists and antitrinitarians.

To recast the genealogy, Comba appeared to employ two criteria for selection: the opposition to the papacy and the presumed belonging to the Italian nation as a territorial community. As for the former, we have already noted that Comba adopted a broader definition of Protestant, accenting that the Italian protests had anteceded the Diet of Speyer.¹¹⁰ Such understandings allowed him to include various figures in his list, from religious dissenters in the modern sense to unconventional thinkers and the political enemy of Rome. Comba himself acknowledged this too-comprehensive nature of his approach:

We must not emphasize their secondary motives or purposes, though we wish to consider the variety of characters and circumstances: it will result in a genial variety rather than the freedom they aspire to. We forewarn our readers so that they will not be left surprised when they see next to the old Catholic, as we would say today, appear here the evangelical, there the free thinker, and the patriot . . . Our Protestants, however dissimilar they may appear and be and even discordant among them, contribute some more, some less, but all, to the progressive affirmation and the reign of truth, which cannot be, nor ever will be the monopoly of any sect.¹¹¹

Another benchmark by which Comba chose his Protestants was their being “Italian.” He excluded from his list individuals who were not born in Italy or whose life was not centered on the peninsula. Of course, Comba did not eliminate them from his history and sometimes mentioned them as background actors. Peter of Bruys, Henry of Toulouse, and Huss, too, conveyed the truth of the Christian religion: however, it was not for Italy. There was no place for them in Comba’s national genealogy of Protestants. His only exception in this regard was something that makes us smile: Valdesius of Lyon.¹¹² With this reorganization of the composition, Comba succeeded in presenting the genealogy not simply of church reformers but of Italy as a Protestant nation:

Let us thank God that Italy had its own protestants. Its own, we say, because while some are Italians by birth, others became Italians by assimilation and adoption; its own, or our Protestants in front of those foreign ones. The proper characteristics they have must not be confused, even in the century of the Reformation and how much it is believed, with the spirit and the manifestations of the protest born and diffused under other skies.¹¹³

¹¹⁰Comba, *I nostri Protestanti*, I, XII.

¹¹¹*Ibid.*, IX–X.

¹¹²On this point, see Felice Tocco, “*I nostri protestanti avanti la Riforma*, by Emilio Comba,” *Archivio Storico Italiano* 16, no. 200 (1895): 334–339.

¹¹³Comba, *I nostri protestanti*, II, VIII.

As far as the definition of Italianness was concerned, Comba remained hardly original: as alluded to above, he imagined the Italian nation as a territorial community. Although he reserved the possibility of naturalization through assimilation or aspiration, he gave it a close connection to a physically defined space and its culture. On this point, it is significant that he included some figures born in the so-called Italia irredenta: Baldo Lupetino was born in Labin (Albona in Italian) and was a bilingual speaker of Italian and Chakavian. His nephew, Matthias Flacius Illyricus, or Matija Vlačić Ilirik, too, was of Labinian origin and known for his activities in the Empire; Pier Paolo Vergerio was born in Kopel (Capodistria) and promoted the translation of the Bible into the south Slavic languages. They all could be heroes of nations other than Italy. By including them in his genealogy, Comba followed not the reality of the early modern multiethnic situation but the logic of nationalism.

In his discourse, Comba provided no conceptual intermediary between a territorial nation and the universal Christian religion. He found no incompatibility between them: indeed, the Waldensian historian identified no specifically Italian element in the religion of his Protestants, supposing their common traits in a struggle with the papacy and the purity of the faith. Nevertheless, he repeatedly professed that the Italian Protestants revealed a unique national character in some way, which distinguished them from German or French protestants. Even though he acknowledged the existence of protestants of other nations, his writings reiterated that the religion of Christ was an essential element of the Italian nation and that the religious reform of Italy would take place within the universal history of Christianity in such a manner to imply the religion of Christ itself as something Italian.

All of these, at first glance, seem confusing to us. In historical discourses, Comba intertwined Christianity and the Italian nation to such an extent that it becomes difficult to discern between them. Is this a result of an excessive use of rhetoric or a sign of inaccuracy of thought?

In my view, it would be appropriate to not blame Comba for self-contradiction or confusion. Instead, we should take this ambiguity as proof of the profound influence of the preceding intellectual frameworks on him; again, Comba echoed the voice of the early modern Waldensians. Two centuries earlier, Léger aligned in his discourse the Waldensian community with the Christian religion: the former, for him, was territorial since it consisted of people living in a specific area, while the latter was universal. Nevertheless, Léger put the latter's universality at the core of the former's identity. Comba expressed the same duality in his writings, presenting the religious reform of the Italian nation as fulfilling a providential role in the history of Christianity, and the national heroes of Italy as assuming a Christian character. Despite his adherence to the *Réveil* theology and liberal nationalism, Comba inherited from his ancestors a sense of community, historical imagination, and a structure of narrative on them.

Indeed, by envisioning the Italian nation as both a religious and territorial community and presenting its past in a genealogical form, Comba proposed a model of the nation a bit similar to the Waldensian church. He claimed that Italy preserved the true Christian character from antiquity, wrote a genealogical history of its Protestants, and depicted it like a territorially defined community—as Morland, Léger, Boyer, Brez, Muston, and Bert all did for the Waldensian church. Although Waldensian missionaries never achieved aspired conversion of the peninsula, Comba's work converted its historical past. He did not only embody the "nationalization" and "Italianization" of the Waldensians: more importantly, in his discourse, Comba had "Waldensianized" the Italian nation.

VI. Conclusion

In liberal Italy, when the government and intellectuals continuously made an effort to “make Italians,” Waldensian pastor Emilio Comba participated in this endeavor with an early modern confessional legacy. This does not mean that he was a person with a conventional mind. We should not forget that Comba was the first Waldensian intellectual who admitted that their ancient origin was nothing but fictional; being an adherent to both liberalism and evangelicalism, he developed his thought in terms of the nation and the religion of Christ as an internal faith, not in terms of the Waldensian church. Nevertheless, despite his positivistic approach in historical research, he continued to see history as *magistra vitae*, entrusting it with both educational and commemorative functions. Moreover, Comba appropriated the early modern confessional framework of the past in his national history, recasting the Waldensian genealogy into a history of Italian Protestants. With these reuses of the early modern intellectual capitals, Comba allowed his Italian nation and religious reform to assume universal and individual qualities.¹¹⁴

In his seminal work on Risorgimento, Alberto Mario Banti pointed out that the idea of the nation in modern Italy derived its appeal from preexisting narratives or symbols.¹¹⁵ However, what Comba did was somewhat different from what Banti envisaged in his thesis. By presenting the Italian nation within a confessional framework, the Waldensian historian preserved an explicit Christian connotation so that the nationalization of historical imagination signified the Christianization of the national past. His religious reform would have its place both in universal-Christian and national history. Comba’s case would give some reservation to the view that regards the religious nature of nationalism as a de-Christianized secular religion.¹¹⁶

Finally, it is worth suggesting a broader context in which we could situate Comba’s enterprises. Yves Krumenacker and Wenjing Wang revealed that in the third republic, memories of Albigenses and Waldenses served as symbol capitals in the construction of a national history of France—not for highlighting the Protestant past of the French nation but for presenting the Reformation as a French product.¹¹⁷ After the defeat of 1870, French Protestants could not be patient that the Protestant Reformation was of German origin and invented the French Reformation tradition from Valdesius and Cathars to Huguenots, relying on the Protestant genealogical historiography of which the Waldensian myths occupied an important part.¹¹⁸ This implies that the same

¹¹⁴In the Waldensian historiography, Comba’s national endeavor had no immediate successor. However, another historian, Jean Jalla (1868–1935), adopted the conception upon a genealogy of the true Christian religion of which the Waldensian church was a part. Under the influence of Comba, Jalla intertwined the history of the Waldensians with a dissent tradition of northern Italy, although without employing a framework of the Italian nation. See Jean Jalla, *Histoire populaire des Vaudois des Alpes et de leurs colonies* (Torre Pellice: Besson, 1904).

¹¹⁵Alberto Mario Banti, *La nazione del Risorgimento: parentela, santità e onore alle origini dell’Italia unita* (Torino: Einaudi, 2000). See in particular 155, 197.

¹¹⁶On relationships between religion and national histories in general, see James C. Kennedy, “Religion, Nation and European Representations of the Past,” in *The Contested Nation: Ethnicity, Class, Religion and Gender in National Histories*, ed. Stefan Berger and Chris Lorenz (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 104–134.

¹¹⁷Krumenacker, “La généalogie imaginaire”; Krumenacker and Wang, “Cathares, vaudois, hussites, ancêtres de la Réforme?”

¹¹⁸Charles-Olivier Carbonell, “Les historiens protestants libéraux ou les illusions d’une histoire scientifique (1870–1914),” in *Historiographie du catharisme* (Toulouse: Privat, 1979), 185–203.

historiographical framework could have been transformed into different national histories, with different compositions and presumed roles: the nineteenth-century Protestants exploited their common intellectual capitals inherited from their early modern ancestors, but in their own mode and according to each purpose. Recent studies on the fortune of John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* in the modern ages have demonstrated a similar phenomenon.¹¹⁹ Historical visions constructed in the midst of confessional conflicts and presented in a perspective of the universal or individual churches were not simply overcome by scientific historiography in the modern period. Instead, they could be read, re-interpreted, and re-proposed within a new framework of nation.

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¹¹⁹David Michael Loades, ed., *John Foxe and the English Reformation* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1997); David Michael Loades, ed., *John Foxe at Home and Abroad* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004); Peter Nockles, "The Changing Legacy and Reception of John Foxe's 'Book of Martyrs' in the 'Long Eighteenth Century': Varieties of Anglican, Protestant and Catholic Response, c. 1760–c. 1850," in *Religion, Politics and Dissent, 1660–1832: Essays in Honour of James E. Bradley*, ed. Robert D Cornwall and William Gibson (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2010), 219–248.

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