

Sunday, February 27, 2011—Grace Life School of Theology—*Church History: A Tale of Two Churches*—Lesson 24 The “Christian” Middle Ages: the Waldensians and the Silver Vain of Truth, Part 3

Who Were the Waldenses?

- “In the Alpine valleys of the Piedmont there had been for centuries congregations of believers calling themselves brethren, who came later to be widely known as *Waldenses* or *Vaudios*, though they did not accept the name..” (Broadbent, 111)
- “They traced their origin in those parts back to apostolic times. Like many of the so-called Cathar, Paulician, and other churches, these were not “reformed,” never having degenerated from the New Testament pattern as had the Roman, Greek, and others, but having always maintained, in varying degree, the apostolic tradition. . . This accounts for the large bodies of Christians, well established in the Scriptures and free from idolatry and other evils prevailing in the dominant, professing Church, to be found in the Taurus Mountains and Alpine valleys.” (Broadbent, 111)
- Miller reports than many of the persecuted Cathari sought rest in the quit valleys of the Piedment amongst the Waldensians. “The more secluded of these regions appear to have been a secure asylum for the witnesses of God until the fourteenth century. Though known to Claudius bishop of Turin, in the ninth century, they seem to have escaped notoriety and conflict until about the thirteenth, if not later.” (Miller, 630)
- Broadbent states the seclusion provide by the mountains offered religious protection of sorts allowing these believers to be unaffected by the development of the Roman Church. He states, “They considered the Scriptures, both for doctrine and church order, to be binding for their time, and not rendered obsolete by change of circumstances. It was said of them that their whole manner of thought and action was an endeavor to hold fast the character of original Christianity.” (Broadbent, 112)
- Miller agrees with Broadbent regarding the spiritual heritage of these Alpine believers. Millers writes, “From the time immemorial these Alpine regions had been inhabited by a race of Christians who continued the same from age to age; who never acknowledge the jurisdiction of the Roman pontiff, and who had been through all periods of ecclesiastical history, a pure branch of the apostolic church.” (Miller, 630)
- Some historians have suggested that Claudius, Bishop of Turin was the founder of the Waldensians in the mountains of the Piedmont. In 1630, Marco Aurelio Rorengo of Turin was ordered to write an account of the history and beliefs of the Waldenses. Rorengo wrote that the Waldensians were so ancient as to afford no absolute certainty in regard to the precise time of their origin, but that, at all events, in the ninth and tenty centuries they were even then not a new sect.” (Broadbent, 113)
- Rorengo further reported that Claudius Bishop of Turin should be number with the Waldensians since he denied the reverence due to the holy cross, rejected the veneration and invocation of saints, destroyed images, and plainly teaches justification by faith in his commentary on Galatians. (Broadbent, 113)

- In 1544 the Waldensians offered the following confession to Francis I of France, “This confession is that which we have received from our ancestors, even from hand to hand, according as their predecessors in all time and in every age have taught and delivered.” (Broadbent, 113)
- A few years later to the Prince of Savoy this confession was offered, “Let your highness consider, that this religion in which we live not merely our religion of the present day, or a religion discovered for the first time only a few years ago, as our enemies falsely pretend, but it is the religion of our fathers and of our grandfathers, yea, of our forefathers and of our predecessors still more remote. It is the religion of the Saints and of the Martyrs, of the Confessors of the Apostles.” (Broadbent, 113)
- In the sixteenth century when the Waldensians encountered the reformers they said, “Our ancestors have often recounted to us that we have existed from the time of the Apostles. In all matters nevertheless we agree with you, and thinking as you think, from the very days of the Apostles themselves, we have ever been consistent respecting the faith.” (Broadbent, 113)
- After an encounter with the Waldensians in 1689, Henri Arnold wrote the following, “be difficult to prove that this poor band of the faithful were in the valleys of the Piedmont more than four centuries before the appearance of those extraordinary personages, Luther and Calvin and the subsequent light of the Reformation. Neither has their church ever been reformed, whence arises the title of Evangelic. The Vaudois are in the fact descended from the refugees from Italy, who, after St. Paul had there preached the gospel abandoned their beautiful country and fled, like the women mention in the Apocalypse, to these wild mountains, where they have to this day handed down the gospel, from father to son, in the same purity and simplicity as it was preached by St. Paul.” (Broadbent, 114)

Where’s Waldo?

- “In 1173 a street-corner singer staged a play about a nobleman who gave away his wealth. This play so impressed a French merchant name Waldo (or “Valdes”) that he committed himself and his wealth to Christ. He funded a French translation of the Bible and became a preacher.” (Jones, 86)
- “Waldo became disturbed as he studied the Scriptures because he found no references to purgatory in the Bible, even though he had been taught that this place definitely existed. More disturbing he found no references to the pope’s supreme power. As a result, Waldo rejected both ideas.” (Jones, 86)
- “Waldo’s fresh focus on Scripture soon attracted a band of followers. They called themselves the “Poor Fold of Lynons.” All Poor Folk, including women learned the Scriptures and shared the gospel in the language of the common people. Within four years, the so-called “Waldensians” or “Vaudois” could be found throughout France.” (Jones, 86)
- “Waldo asked the pope to approve his movement. The Pope agreed . . . with one condition. Poor Folk could preach in Lyons only when a bishop asked time to preach. Three years, later, Waldo preached in Lyons with no invitation. The Poor Fold were

thrown out of Lyons. A few returned to the Roman Church. The remaining Waldensians ignored the church's condemnation and kept preaching." (Jones, 86)

- Broadbent disagrees with Jones regarding Waldo being the founder of the Waldensians. Broadbent writes, "The relations of Peter Waldo with the Waldenses were so intimate that many call him the founder of that sect . . . It is true that Waldo was highly esteemed among them, but not possible that he could have been their founder, since they founded their faith and practice on the Scriptures and were followers of those who from the earliest times had done the same. For outsiders to give them the name of a man prominent among them was only to follow the usual habit of their opponents, who did not like to admit their right to call themselves as they did, "Christians" or "brethren." (Broadbent, 115)
- "Peter Waldo continued his travels and eventually reached Bohemia, where he died (1217), having labored there for years and sown much seed, the fruit of which was seen in the spiritual harvest in that country at the time of Huss and later. The accession of Peter Waldo and his band of preachers gave an extraordinary impetus to the missionary activities of the Waldenses, who until this time had been somewhat isolated in their remote valleys, but now went everywhere preaching the Word." (Broadbent, 115)
- "When he died, Waldo remained under the condemnation of the Roman Catholic Church. At the Fourth Lateran Council, Innocent III reiterated the excommunication. By the mid 1200s the Inquisition began working to destroy the Waldensians. Hundreds of Poor Folk were executed by Crusaders. The remaining Poor Folk fled to Germany and Spain." (Jones, 86)

Beliefs of the Waldensians

- Kenneth Scott Latourette, author of *A History of Christianity: Beginnings to 1500* ascribes the following beliefs and practices to the Waldensians:
 - Memorized large portions of the New Testament in the vernacular languages.
 - Went out two by two when preaching, simply clad and barefoot.
 - Refused to heed Pope or Bishop and taught that the Church of Rome was not the head of the Catholic Church but was corrupt.
 - Laymen could preach
 - Mass and prayers for the dead were without Scriptural foundation
 - Purgatory does not exist
 - Criticized prayers in Latin because they were not understood by the people
 - They had and maintain their own clergy/elders (Latourette, 452)
- Latourette reports how the Catholic Church branded the Waldensians as heretics and sought to eliminate them, by persuasion if possible and by force if necessary. (Latourette, 453)
- Schaff also includes a discussion of the Waldensians in a chapter titled "Heresy and Its Suppression," in Volume V of his *History of the Christian Church*.
 - "Distinct from the Cathari and other sects in origin and doctrine, but sharing with them the condemnation of the established Church, were the Waldenses. . . The

Waldenses, leaning upon the Scriptures, sought to revive the simple precepts of the Apostolic age. They were the strictly biblical sect of the Middle Ages. This fact, and the pitiless and protracted persecutions to which they were subjected, long ago won the sympathies of the Protestant churches.” (Schaff, Volume V)

- “Very unexpectedly the Waldenses made their appearance at the Third Lateran council, 1179, at least two of their number being present. They besought Alexander III. to give his sanction to their mode of life and to allow them to go on preaching. They presented him with a copy of their Bible translation. The pope appointed a commission to examine them. . . Without calling the Waldenses by name, the council forbade them to preach. ” (Schaff, Volume V)
- “In their earliest period the Waldenses were not heretics, although the charge was made against them that they claimed to be "the only imitators of Christ." Closely as they and the Cathari were associated geographically and by the acts of councils, papal decrees, and in literary refutations of heresy, the Waldenses differ radically from the Cathari. They never adopted Manichaeian elements. Nor did they repudiate the sacramental system of the established Church and invent strange rites of their own. They were also far removed from mysticism and have no connection with the German mystics as some of the other sectaries had. They were likewise not Protestants, for we seek in vain among them for a statement of the doctrine of justification by faith. It is possible, they held to the universal priesthood of believers. According to de Bourbon and others, they declared all good men to be priests. They placed the stress upon following the practice of the Apostles and obeying the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount, and they did not know the definition which Luther put on the word "justification." They approached more closely to an opinion now current among Protestants when they said, righteousness is found only in good men and good women.” (Schaff, Volume V)
- “The first distinguishing principle of the Waldenses bore on daily conduct and was summed up in the words of the Apostles, "we ought to obey God rather than men." This the Catholics interpreted to mean a refusal to submit to the authority of the pope and prelates.”
- “The second distinguishing principle was the authority and popular use of the Scriptures. Here again the Waldenses anticipated the Protestant Reformation without realizing, as is probable, the full meaning of their demand. The reading of the Bible, it is true, had not yet been forbidden, but Waldo made it a living book and the vernacular translation was diligently taught.” (Schaff, Volume V)
- “The third principle was the importance of preaching and the right of laymen to exercise that function. Peter Waldo and his associates were lay evangelists. All the early documents refer to their practice of preaching as one of the worst heresies of the Waldenses and an evident proof of their arrogance and insubordination.” (Schaff, Volume V)
- Broadbent and Ruckman have a much different take on the beliefs and practices of the Waldensians.

- “The doctrines and practices of these brethren, known as Waldenses, and also by other names, were of such a character that it is evident they were not the fruits of an effort to reform the Roman and Greek churches and bring them back to more scriptural ways. Bearing no traces of influence of those churches, they indicate, on the contrary, the continuance of an old tradition, handed down from quite another source—the teaching of Scripture and the practice of the primitive Church. Their existence proves that there had always been men of faith, men of spiritual power and understanding, who had maintained in the churches a tradition close to that of apostolic days, and far removed from that which the dominant Churches had developed.” (Broadbent, 119)
- “Apart from the Holy Scriptures they had no special confession of faith or religion, nor any rules; and not authority of any man, however eminent, was allowed to set aside the authority of Scripture.” (Broadbent, 119)
- Broadbent reports that they favored the gospels and the Sermon on the Mount as their main sources of doctrine, denied salvation through the sacraments, appointed their own elders in rejection of the Catholic hierarchy, rejected the Mass and taught the Lord’s Supper as a memorial of the Christ’s work on their behalf, and advocate daily individual Bible reading. (Broadbent, 119-121)
- Ruckman reports that the Waldenses were the strictly Biblical sect of the Middle Ages living completely apart from the Catholic Church. (Ruckman, 383)
- Ruckman (and others) considers the Waldensians to be Bible-believing Baptists because of their belief in the following doctrines and practices:
 - Bible as the final authority in all matters of faith and practice
 - Distribution of the Bible in the vernacular language (translated from the Old Latin not the Vulgate)
 - Rejection of Catholic hierarchy
 - Lay preachers
 - Rejection of infant baptism and the baptism of only believing adults
 - Teaching of eternal security and justification by faith in the finished atonement of Jesus Christ.
 - Belief that the Roman Catholic Church was the Babylonian Whore of Revelation 17 (Ruckman, 384)
- The Waldensians appear to be the Middle Ages equivalent of an IFCA church in modern times. They believed many things that you and I would agree with but don’t appear to strictly Pauline like the groups we have studied of the past couple of weeks.

The Inquisition and the Persecution of the Waldensians

- Last week we quoted from Shelley’s *Church History in Plain Language* that one of the methods developed by the Catholics to deal with these so-called heretics was the inquisition. Shelley wrote, “Three weapons were at the Catholic Church’s disposal: preaching to return them to the truth, a crusade to crush all hardened resistance, and the Inquisition to uproot heresy completely.” (Shelley, 210)

- Shelley presents the most succinct assessment of the development of the inquisition:
 - “The early form of the Inquisition appeared in 1184 when Pope Lucius III required bishops to “inquire” into the beliefs of their subjects. In short, Heresy or harboring a heretic brought immediate excommunication.” (Shelley, 211)
 - “The spread of the Waldenses and Albigenses, however, called for stricter measures. In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council, under Innocent III’s leadership, provide for the state’s punishment of heretics, the confiscation of their property, excommunication for those unwilling to move against the heretic, and complete forgiveness of sins for those cooperating.” (Shelley, 211)
 - In 1229 the Synod of Toulouse systematized inquisition policies, leaving the alleged heretic with virtually no rights. The inquisitor was subject to no law, only to the pope. He was prosecutor and judge. The “trial” was secret, and the accused had to prove his innocence—as in all courts following Roman law—without the benefit of counsel or knowledge of his accusers. (Shelley, 211-212)
 - “The final, significant step came in 1252. Pope Innocent IV authorized torture as a means of getting information and confessions from accused heretics.” (Shelley, 212)
- “Cannon Law, it is true, forbade a cleric from shedding blood. He who served the alters of the One Sacrifice must not sacrifice men. He could only hound, and interrogate, and torture the prisoner. If he found the unfortunate person guilty of heresy he turned him over to civil authorities, usually for burning at the stake.” (Shelley, 212)
- “It was an ugly business, but almost everyone, after Augustine, agreed that saving the body by amputating a rotten limb was the path of wisdom. Clearly the Church of Rome was the body and the heretic the rotten limb.” (Shelley, 212)
- After being an apologist for the Catholic Church when it comes to the subject of the inquisition all of a sudden Schaff is shocked by the actions of the “historic church.” Schaff writes the following concerning the origin and purpose of the inquisition:
 - “The measures for the repression and extermination of heresy culminated in the organized system, known as the Inquisition. Its history presents what is probably the most revolting spectacle in the annals of civilized Europe. The representatives of the Church appear, sitting as arbiters over human destiny in this world, and in the name of religion applying torture to countless helpless victims, heretics, and reputed witches, and pronouncing upon them a sentence which, they knew, involved perpetual imprisonment or death in the flames.” (Schaff, Volume V)
 - “The cold heartlessness, with which the fate of the heretic was regarded, finds some excuse in the pitiless penalties which the civil tribunals of the Middle Ages meted out for civil crimes, such as the breaking of the victim on the wheel, burning in caldrons of oil, quartering with horses, and flaying alive, or the merciless treatment of princes upon refractory subjects. . .” (Schaff, Volume V)

- “It has been argued in extenuation of the Church that she stopped with the decree of excommunication and the sentence to lifelong imprisonment and did not pronounce the sentence of death. And the old maxim is quoted as true of her in all times, that the Church abhors blood—*ecclesia non sitit sanguinem*. The argument is based upon a pure technicality. The Church, after sitting in judgment, turned the heretics over to the civil authorities, knowing full well that, as night follows day, the sentence of death would follow her sentence of excommunication. Yea, the Church, through popes and synodal decrees, again and again threatened, with her disfavor and fell spiritual punishments, princes and municipalities not punishing heresy. The Fourth Lateran forbade priests pronouncing judgments of blood and being present at executions, but at the very same moment, and at the pope’s persistent instigation, crusading armies were drenching the soil of Southern France with the blood of the Albigenses. A writer of the thirteenth century says in part truly, in part speciously, "our pope does not kill nor condemn any one to death, but the law puts to death those whom the pope allows to be put to death, and they kill themselves who do those things which make them guilty of death." (Schaff, Volume V)
- “The Inquisition was a thoroughly papal institution, wrought out in all its details by the popes of the thirteenth century, beginning with Innocent III. and not ending with Boniface VIII. In his famous manual for the treatment of heresy the Inquisitor, Bernard Guy, a man who in spite of his office elicits our respect, declares that the "office of the Inquisition has its dignity from its origin for it is derived, commissioned, and known to have been instituted by the Apostolic see itself." This was the feeling of the age.” (Schaff, Volume V)
- “Precedent enough there was for severe temporal measures. Constantine banished the Arians and burned their books. Theodosius the Great fixed death as the punishment for heresy. The Priscillianists were executed in 385. The great authority of Augustine was appealed to and his fatal interpretation of the words of the parable "Compel them to come in,"¹¹²² justifying force in the treatment of the Donatists, was made to do service far beyond what that father probably ever intended. From the latter part of the twelfth century, councils advocated the death penalty, popes insisted upon it, and Thomas Aquinas elaborately defended it. Heresy, so the theory and the definitions ran, was a crime the Church could not tolerate. It was Satan’s worst blow.” (Schaff, Volume V)
- Ruckman reports that in 1262 Pope Urban IV issued a papal bull asking the office of the Inquisition to exterminate the heretics so that the vine of the Lord might bear the fruit of Catholic purity. (Ruckman, 387)
- “The Inquisition was purely and uniquely a Catholic institution; it was founded for the express purpose of exterminating every human being in Europe who differed from Roman Catholic beliefs and practices. It spread out from France, Milan, Geneva, Aragon, and Sardinia to Poland and then to Bohemia and Rome. It was not abolished in Spain until 1820.” (Ruckman, 388)
- A court of Catholic bishops never sent any Catholic to death for any crime except heresy. Murder, adultery, rape fornication, embezzlement, kidnapping, lying stealing, fraud, and drunkenness were minor offences compared with teaching the Bible. (Ruckman, 431)

- Between 1000 and 1500 the Church outstripped ever group of butchers in history of human slaughter with the possible exception of the Mongolian hordes under Genghis Khan. Some have estimates hold the church culpable in the deaths of 900,000 people during the times period with estimates reaching as high as 40,000,000 over a 15 century span. (Ruckman, 402)
- In 1380, a monk inquisitor named Francis Borelli was sent into the Piedmont by Pope Clement VII to search out heretics. Armed with a Papal Bull the communities were ransacked in a search for heretics. In a space of 13 years about 230 Waldensians were executed. (Miller, 629)
- “In the winter of 1400, the massacre extended from Dauphiny to the Italian valley of Pragela. The poor people, seeing their mounting caves possessed by their enemies, fled over the Alps.” One hundred babies are reported to have died in their flight through the heights of the Alps along with untold others. (Miller, 631)
- “In the Piedmont, the Archbishop of Turin laboured much to promote the persecutions of the Waldenses. Their charge against them was that they made no offerings for the dead, valued not masses, and absolutions, and took no care to redeem their relations from the pains of purgatory.” (Miller, 632)
- “About the year 1486 the memorable Bull of Innocent VIII, gave unlimited powers to Albert de Capitaneis, archdeacon of Cremona, to carry confiscation and death into the infected valleys. An army of eighteen thousand was raised, and precipitated into the mountain retreats of the Waldenses.” (Miller, 632)
- “So far Rome had utterly failed to accomplish her cruel and fiend-like object. She had determined to exterminate these obstinate opponents of popery, but faithful witnesses of the truth; and to eradicate their very name from the valleys. But wonderful to say, neither the individual executions nor the indiscriminate slaughters, the secret treachery nor the open violence, could prevail for their extinction.” (Miller, 632-633)

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