

The Pilgrim Church - Part 7

by E.H. Broadbent

This sermon explores the history of the Waldenses, a Christian movement from the 12th century, and their struggles with the Roman Catholic Church, as well as the emergence of the Franciscan Order and its impact on the Church and society.

Scripture: Matthew 5:10, John 15:18, Romans 8:35, 2 Timothy 3:12, 1 Peter 4:12

Topics: "Persecution", "Martyrdom"

Description

E.H. Broadbent preaches about the historical devastation and persecution faced by the brethren in Languedoc, Provence, and the Alpine valleys, such as the Albigenses, Waldenses, and Poor Men of Lyons, who held firm to their beliefs despite ruthless crusades and inquisitions by the Roman Church. The sermon highlights the unwavering faith and commitment of these believers to follow Christ and uphold the teachings of the Scriptures, even in the face of severe persecution, martyrdom, and the destruction of their churches and communities.

Transcript

[Provence Devastated]

In Languedoc and Provence in the South of France, there was a civilization in advance of that in other countries. The pretensions of the Roman Church to rule had been generally opposed and set aside there. The congregations of believers who met apart from the Catholic Church were numerous and increasing. They are often called Albigenses, a name taken from Albi, a district where there were many of them, but this name was never used by them, nor of them until a later period. They had intimate connections with the brethren--whether called Waldenses, Poor Men of Lyons, Bogomils, or otherwise--in the surrounding countries, where churches spread among the various peoples.

Pope Innocent III required of the Count of Toulouse, Raymond VI, who ruled in Provence, and of the other rulers and prelates in the South of France, that the heretics should be banished. This would have meant the ruin of the country. Raymond temporised, but was soon involved in a hopeless quarrel with the Pope, who in 1209 proclaimed a crusade against him and his people. Indulgences, such as had been given to the Crusaders who went at great risk to themselves to rescue the Holy Places in Palestine from the Mohammedan Saracens, were now offered to all who would take part in the easier work of destroying the most fruitful provinces of France. This, and the prospect of booty and licence of every kind attracted hundreds of thousands of men.

Under the presidency of high clerical dignitaries and led by Simon de Montfort, a military leader of great ability and a man of boundless ambition and ruthless cruelty, the most beautiful and cultivated part of Europe at that time was ravaged, became for twenty years the scene of unspeakable wickedness and cruelty and was reduced to desolation.

When the town of Beziers was summoned to surrender, the Catholic inhabitants joined with the Dissenters in refusing, though warned that if the place were taken no soul should be left alive. The town was captured, and of the tens of thousands who had taken refuge there none were spared. After the capture of another place, La Minerve, about 140 believers were found, women in one house, men in another, engaged in prayer as they awaited their doom. De Montfort had a great pile of wood prepared, and told them to be converted to the Catholic faith or mount that pile. They answered that they owned no papal or priestly authority, only that of Christ and His Word. The fire was lighted and the confessors, without hesitation, entered the flames.

[The Inquisition Begins in 1210]

It was near this spot, in the neighbourhood of Narbonne, that the Inquisition was established (1210), under the superintendence of Dominic, the founder of the Dominican order. When, at the Council of Toulouse (1229) it was made a permanent institution, the Bible, excepting only the Latin Psalter, was forbidden to the laity, and it was decreed that they might have no part of it translated into their own languages. The Inquisition finished what the crusade had left undone. Many of the brethren fled to the Balkan countries, others were scattered throughout the neighbouring lands, the civilization of Provence disappeared and the independent provinces of the south were incorporated into the kingdom of France.

70-1700

In the Alpine valleys of Piedmont there had been for centuries congregations of believers calling themselves brethren, who came later to be widely known as Waldenses, or Vaudois, though they did not themselves accept the name. 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 some others, but having always maintained, in varying degree, the Apostolic tradition. From the time of Constantine there had continued to be a succession of those who preached the Gospel and founded churches, uninfluenced by the relations between Church and State existing at the time. This accounts for the large bodies of Christians, well established in the Scriptures and free from idolatry and the other evils prevailing in the dominant, professing Church, to be found in the Taurus Mountains and the Alpine valleys.

[Churches in Alpine Valleys]

These latter, in the quiet seclusion of their mountains, had remained unaffected by the development of the Roman Church. 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 endeavour to hold fast the character of original Christianity. One mark of their not being "reformers" is to be observed in their comparative tolerance of the Roman Catholic Church, a reformer almost inevitably emphasizing the evil of that from which he has separated, in order to justify his action. In their dealings with contemporaries who seceded from the Church of Rome, as well as later in their negotiations with the reformers of the Reformation, this acknowledgment of what was good in the Church that persecuted them is repeatedly seen.

The inquisitor Reinerius, who died in 1259, has left it on record:

"Concerning the sects of ancient heretics, observe, that there have been more than seventy: all of which, except the sects of the Manichaeans and the Arians and the Runcarians and the Leonists which have infected Germany, have through the favour of God, been destroyed. Among all these sects, which either still exist or which have formerly existed, there is not one more pernicious to the Church than that of the Leonists: and this for three reasons. The first reason is; because it has been of longer continuance, for some say that it has lasted from the time of Sylvester, others, from the time of the Apostles. The second reason is: because it is more general, for there is scarcely any land, in which this sect does not exist. The third reason is; because, while all other sects, through the enormity of their blasphemies against God, strike horror into the hearers, this of the Leonists has a great semblance of piety, inasmuch as they live justly before men, and believe every point well respecting God together with all the articles contained in the creed: only they blaspheme the Roman Church and clergy, to which the multitude of the laity are ready enough to give credence."

A later writer, Pilichdorf, also a bitter opponent, says that the persons who claimed to have thus existed from the time of Pope Sylvester were the Waldenses.

[Antiquity of the Waldenses]

Some have suggested that Claudius, Bishop of Turin, was the founder of the Waldenses in the mountains of Piedmont. He and they had much in common, and must have strengthened and encouraged one another, but the brethren called Waldenses were of much older origin. A Prior of St. Roch at Turin, Marco Aurelio Rorenco, was ordered in 1630 to write an account of the history and opinions of the Waldenses. He wrote that the Waldenses are 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 tenth centuries they were even then not a new sect. And he adds that in the ninth century so far from being a new sect, they were rather to be deemed a race of fomenters and encouragers of opinions which had preceded them. Further, he wrote that Claudius of Turin was to be reckoned among these fomenters and encouragers, inasmuch as he was a person who denied the reverence due to the holy cross, who rejected the veneration and invocation of saints, and who was a principal destroyer of images. In his commentary on the Epistle to the Galatians, Claudius plainly teaches justification by faith, and points out the error of the Church in departing from that truth.

The brethren in the valleys never lost the knowledge and consciousness of their origin and unbroken history there. When from the fourteenth century onward the valleys were invaded and the people had to negotiate with surrounding rulers, they always emphasised this. To the Princes of Savoy, who had had the longest dealings with them, they could always assert without fear of contradiction the uniformity of their faith, from father to son, through time immemorial, even from the very age of the Apostles.

To Francis I of France they said, in 1544: "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." A few years later, to the Prince of Savoy they said: "Let your Highness consider, that this religion in which we live is 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 and of the Apostles."

When they came into contact with the Reformers in the sixteenth century 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." On the return of the Vaudois to their valleys, their leader, Henri Arnold, in 1689 said: "That their religion is as primitive as their name is venerable is attested even by their adversaries," and then quotes Reinarius the Inquisitor who, in a report made by him to the Pope on the subject of their faith, admits, "they have existed from time immemorial." "It would not," Arnold continues, "be difficult to prove that this poor band of the faithful were in the valleys of Piedmont more than four centuries before the appearance of those extraordinary personages, Luther and Calvin and the subsequent lights of the Reformation. Neither has their Church ever been reformed, whence arises its title of Evangelic. The Vaudois are in fact descended from those refugees from Italy, who, after St. Paul had there preached the Gospel, abandoned their beautiful country and fled, like the woman mentioned 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."

1160-1318

[Peter Waldo ?-c. 1217]

Peter Waldo of Lyons, a successful merchant and banker, was aroused to see his need of salvation by the sudden death of one of the guests at a feast he had given. He became so much interested in the Scriptures that (1160) he employed clerks to translate parts into the Romance dialect. He had been touched by the story of St. Alexius, of whom it was related that he sold all that he had and went on a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. A theologian directed Waldo to the Lord's words in Matthew 19. 21: "If thou wilt be perfect, go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow Me." He therefore (1173) made over his landed property to his wife, sold the remainder and distributed it among the poor.

For a time he devoted himself to the study of the Scriptures and then (1180) gave himself to travelling and preaching, taking as a guide the Lord's words: "He sent His disciples two and two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself would come. Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. Go your ways: behold I send you forth as lambs among wolves. Carry neither purse nor scrip nor shoes: and salute no man by the way."

[Poor Men of Lyons]

Companions joined him, and, travelling and preaching in this way, came to be known as the "Poor Men of Lyons". Their appeal for recognition (1179) to the third Lateran Council, under Pope Alexander III, had already been scornfully refused. They were driven out of Lyons by Imperial edict and (1184) excommunicated. Scattered over the surrounding countries, their preaching proved very effectual, and "Poor Men of Lyons" became one of the many names attached to those who followed Christ and His teaching.

An inquisitor, David of Augsburg, says: "The sect of the Poor Men of Lyons and similar ones are the more dangerous the more they adorn themselves with the appearance of piety ... their manner of life is, to outward appearance, humble and modest, but pride is in their hearts"; they say they have pious men among them, but do not see, he continues, "that we have infinitely more and better than they, and such as

do not clothe themselves in mere appearance, whereas among the heretics all is wickedness covered by hypocrisy." An old chronicle tells how as early as the year 1177 "disciples of Peter Waldo came from Lyons to Germany and began to preach in Frankfurt and in Nuremberg, but because the Council in Nuremberg was warned that they should seize and burn them, they disappeared into Bohemia."

The relations of Peter Waldo with the Waldenses were so intimate that many called him the founder of a sect of that name, though others derive the name from the Alpine valleys, Vallenses, in which so many of those believers lived. It is true that Waldo was highly esteemed among them, but not possible that he should 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".

Peter Waldo continued his travels and eventually reached Bohemia, where he died (1217), having laboured 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.

[Francis of Assisi 1182-1226]

Within the Roman Catholic Church there were many souls suffering under the prevailing worldliness, who desired a revival of spiritual life yet did not come out of that system and join themselves to these churches of believers which, outside of it, were endeavouring to act on the principles of Scripture. In the same year (1209) in which Pope Innocent III inaugurated the crusade against the South of France, Francis of Assisi, then 25 years old, hearing at mass one winter morning the words of Jesus from the tenth chapter of Matthew, in which He gave commands to the twelve apostles as He sent them out to preach, saw in this the way of the reformation he had desired and felt himself called to preach in utmost poverty and humility. From this sprang the order of Franciscan Friars which so quickly spread over the world.

[The Friars]

Francis was a wonderful preacher, and his sincerity and devotion and joyous nature drew multitudes to hear him. In 1210 he went to Rome with the little company of his earliest followers, and obtained from the Pope a somewhat reluctant verbal approval of their 'Rule', with permission to preach. The numbers wishing to join were soon so great that to meet the needs of those who desired to keep the Rule, and yet continue in their usual vocations the "Third Order" was formed, the Tertiaries, who continued their secular occupations while submitting themselves to a prescribed rule of life, the pattern of which is chiefly found in the instructions of the Lord Jesus to the Apostles.

They vowed to restore ill-gotten gains, be reconciled to enemies, live in peace with all, live a life of prayer and works of charity, keep fasts and vigils, pay tithes to the church, take no oaths, nor bear arms, use no bad language, practise piety to the dead. The spirit of Francis burned for the conversion of heathen and Mohammedans, as well as for that of his own Italians, and twice he suffered almost to death in endeavouring to reach and preach to the infidels in Palestine and Morocco.

In 1219 the second Chapter General of the Order was held and numerous friars were sent out to all countries, from Germany to North Africa, and later to England also. Five who went to Morocco suffered

martyrdom. The Order soon grew beyond the power of Francis to control it, came under the organizing authority of men of different ideals, and, to his great grief, the Rule of Poverty was modified. After his death (1226) the division, which had begun earlier, between the strict and the lax friars, became more acute; the stricter ones, or Spirituali, were persecuted, four of them being burnt in Marseilles (1318), and in the same year the Pope formally declared to be heresy the teaching that Christ and His Apostles possessed nothing.

[The Dominican & Franciscan Orders]

These new orders of Friars, the Dominicans and Franciscans, like the older orders of monks, arose from a sincere desire for deliverance from intolerable evils prevailing in the Church and the world, and from the soul's quest after God. While the older monastic orders were chiefly occupied with personal salvation and sanctification, the later orders of friars devoted themselves more to helping in their needs and miseries the men and women around them. Both institutions, the Monastic and the Preaching Orders, for a time exercised a widespread influence for good, yet both, being founded on the ideas of men, quickly degenerated, and became instruments of evil--active agents in opposing those who sought revival by carrying out and making known the Scriptures.

The histories of the monks and of the friars show that if a spiritual movement can be kept within the confines of the Roman Catholic Church or any similar system it is doomed, and must inevitably be dragged down to the level of that which it sought originally to reform. It purchases exemption from persecution at the cost of its life. Francis of Assisi and Peter Waldo were both laid hold of by the same teaching of the lord, and yielded themselves to Him with uttermost devotion. In each case the example set and the teaching given gained the hearts of large numbers and affected their whole manner of life. The likeness turned to contrast when the one was accepted and the other rejected by the organised religion of Rome. The inward relation to the Lord may have remained the same, but the working out of the two lives differed widely. The Franciscans being absorbed into the Roman system, helped to bind men to it, while Waldo and his band of preachers directed multitudes of souls to the Scriptures, where they learned to draw for themselves fresh and inexhaustible supplies from the "wells of salvation."

1100-1500

In 1163 a Council of the Romish Church at Tours,[43] called together by Pope Alexander III, forbade any intercourse with Waldenses because they taught "a damnable heresy, long since sprung up in the territory of Toulouse." Before the close of the 12th century there was a numerous Waldensian church in Metz, which had translations of the Bible in use. The church in Cologne had long been in existence in 1150 when a number of its members were executed, of whom their judge said "They went to their death not only with patience but with enthusiasm."

In Spain in 1192 King Alfonso of Aragon issued an edict against them and stated that in doing so he was acting according to the example of his predecessors. They were numerous in France, Italy, Austria, and many other countries. In the Diocese of Passau, in 1260, they were to be found in forty-two parishes, and a priest of Passau wrote at that time: "In Lombardy, Provence, and elsewhere the heretics had more schools than the theologians, and far more hearers. They disputed openly, and called the people to solemn meetings in the Market places or in the open fields. No one dared to hinder them, on account of the power and number of their admirers."

In Strassbourg in 1212 the Dominicans had already arrested 500 persons who belonged to churches of the Waldenses. They were of all classes, nobles, priests, rich and poor, men and women. The prisoners said that there were many like them in Switzerland, Italy, Germany, Bohemia, etc. Eighty of them, including 12 priests and 23 women were given over to the flames. Their leader and elder, named John, declared as he was about to die, "We are all sinners, but it is not our faith that makes us so, nor are we guilty of the blasphemy of which we are accused without reason; but we expect the forgiveness of our sins, and that without the help of men, and not through the merit of our own works." The goods of those executed were divided between the Church and the civil authority, which placed its power at the disposition of the Church.

A decretal of Pope Gregory IX, in 1263, declared--"We excommunicate and anathematise all heretics, Cathars, Patarenes, Poor Men of Lyons, Passagini, Josepini, Arnaldistae, Speronistae, and others, by whatever names they may be known, having indeed different faces, but being united by their tails, and meeting in the same point through their vanity." The inquisitor, David of Augsburg, admitted that formerly "the sects were one sect" and that now they hold together in the presence of their enemies. These scattered notices, taken from among many, are sufficient to show that primitive churches were widespread in Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, that in some parts they were so numerous and influential as to have a large measure of liberty, though elsewhere they were subjected to the most cruel persecution, and that, although many names were given to them, and there must have been variety of view among so many, yet they were essentially one, and had constant communication and fellowship with one another.

[Teaching of the Waldenses]

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 the 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.

Apart from the Holy Scriptures they had no special confession of faith or religion, nor any rules, and no authority of any man, however eminent, was allowed to set aside the authority of Scripture. Yet, throughout the centuries, and in all countries, they confessed the same truths and had the same practices. They valued Christ's own words, in the Gospels, as being the highest revelation, and if ever they were unable to reconcile any of His words with other portions of Scripture, while they accepted all, they acted on what seemed to them the plain meaning of the Gospels. Following Christ was their chief theme and aim, keeping His words, imitating His example. "The Spirit of Christ", they said, "is effective in any man in the measure in which he obeys the words of Christ and is His true follower. It is only Christ who can give the ability to understand His words. If anyone love Him he will keep His words." A few great truths were looked upon as essential to fellowship, but otherwise, in matters open to doubt or to difference of view, large liberty was allowed. They maintained that the inner testimony of the indwelling Spirit of Christ is of great importance, since the highest truths come from the heart to the mind; not that new revelation is given, but a clearer understanding of the Word.

The portion of Scripture most dwelt upon was the Sermon on the Mount, this being looked upon as the rule of life for the children of God. The brethren were opposed to the shedding of blood, even to capital punishment, to any use of force in matters of faith and to taking any proceedings against such as harmed them. Yet most of them allowed self-defence, even with weapons; so the inhabitants of the valleys defended themselves and their families when attacked. They would take no oaths nor use the Name of God or of Divine things lightly, though on certain occasions they might allow themselves to be put on oath. They did not admit the claim of the great professing Church to open or close the way of salvation, nor did they believe that salvation was through any sacraments or by anything but faith in Christ, which showed itself in the activities of love. They held the doctrine of the sovereignty of God in election, together with that of man's free will.

They considered that in all times and in all forms of churches there were enlightened men of God. They therefore made use of the writings of Ambrose, Augustine, Chrysostom, Bernard of Clairvaux and others, not accepting, however, all they wrote, but only that which corresponded with the older, purer teaching of Scripture. The love of theological disputation and pamphlet war was not developed among them, as among so many others; yet they were ready to die for the truth, laid great stress on the value of practical piety and desired in quietness to serve God and to do good.

[Church Order]

In matters of church order they practised simplicity, and there was nothing among them corresponding to that which had grown up in the Church of Rome. Yet the Churches and elders accepted their responsibilities with the utmost seriousness. In matters of discipline, appointment of elders, and other acts, the whole church took part, in conjunction with its elders. The Lord's Supper was in both kinds and for all believers, and was looked upon as a remembrance of the Lord's body given for them and at the same time as a strong exhortation to yield themselves to be broken and poured out for His sake. "As to baptism," writes an opponent, Pseudo-Reimer (1260), "some err, claiming that little children are not saved by baptism, for, they declare, the Lord says 'he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved', but a child does not yet believe."

They believed in Apostolic succession through the laying on of the hands of such as had it on those really called to receive this grace. They taught that the Church of Rome had lost this when Pope Sylvester accepted the union of Church and State, but that it remained among themselves. When, however, through circumstances, it was not possible of application, God could convey the needed grace without it.

Those whom they called "Apostles" played an important part in their testimony. While the elders and overseers remained in their homes and churches, the "Apostles" travelled continually, visiting the churches. A distinction was made between those called to be "Perfect," and others of the followers of Christ, based on the fact that in the Gospels some were called to sell all that they had and follow Christ, while others of His disciples were equally called to serve Him in the surroundings in which He found them. The Waldensian Apostles had no property or goods or home or family; if they had had these they left them. Their life was one of self-denial, hardship and danger. They travelled in utmost simplicity, without money, without a second suit, their needs being supplied by the believers among whom they ministered the Word.

They always went two and two, an elder and a younger man, of whom the latter waited on his older companion. Their visits were highly esteemed, and they were treated with every token of respect and

affection. Owing to the dangers of the times they usually travelled as business men and often the younger men carried light wares, as knives, needles, etc., for sale. They never asked for anything; indeed, many undertook serious medical studies that they might be able to care for the bodies of those they met with. The name "Friends of God" was often given to them. Great care was used in commending men to such service, since it was felt that one devoted man was worth more than a hundred whose call to this ministry was less evident.

The Apostles chose poverty, but otherwise it was considered a principal duty of each church to provide for its poor. Often, when private houses were insufficient and simple meeting rooms were built, there would be houses attached to these where their poor or aged could live and be cared for.

Regular individual reading of the Scriptures, regular daily family worship, and frequent Conferences were among the most highly-prised means of maintaining spiritual life. These saints would take no part in government; they said the Apostles were often brought before tribunals, but it is not ever said that they sat as judges.

They valued education as well as spirituality; many who ministered the Word among them had taken a degree at one of the Universities. Pope Innocent III (1198-1216) bore a double testimony to them when he said that among the Waldenses educated laymen undertook the functions of preachers, and again, that the Waldenses would only listen to a man who had God in him.

The comparative peace of the Waldensian valleys was broken when, in 1380, Pope Clement VII sent a monk as inquisitor to deal with heretics in certain parts. In the next thirteen years about 230 persons were burnt, the goods of the sufferers being divided between the inquisitors and the rulers of the country. In the winter of 1400 the scope of the persecution was enlarged, and many families took refuge in the higher mountains, where most of the children and women and many men died of cold and hunger. In 1486 a Bull of Innocent VIII gave authority to the Archdeacon of Cremona to extirpate the heretics, and eighteen thousand men invaded the valleys. Then the peasants began to defend themselves, and, taking advantage of the mountainous nature of the country, and their knowledge of it, drove back the attacking force, but for more than a hundred years the conflict continued.

[Beghard and Beghine]

From the twelfth century there begin to be records of houses where poor and old and infirm people lived together, doing such work as they could, and helped by the gifts of wealthy benefactors. Though the members of such households took no vows, and never begged, and so the houses differed from convents, yet they were of a religious character. They were called "workhouses" and those in them called themselves "Christ's Paupers". Frequently an "Infirmity" was attached to the house, and many of the sisters devoted themselves to nursing the sick, while the brethren often held schools and taught in them. They liked to call such an institution "God's House". Later the names of Beghard and Beghine were used to describe them, the former name being given to the men's and the latter to the women's houses. From the beginning they were suspected of "heretical" tendencies, and, indeed, there is no doubt that they were constantly a refuge for brethren who, in times of persecution, lived quietly under their shelter. In course of time they came to be looked upon as always heretical institutions, and numbers of their members were put to death. In the latter part of the 14th century they were taken possession of by the Papal authorities and transferred, for the most part, to the Franciscan Tertiaries.

FOOTNOTES:

[41]"Latin Christianity" Dean Milman.

[42]"The Ancient Vallenses and Albigenses" G. S. Faber. "Facts and Documents illustrative of the History, Doctrine and Rites of the Ancient Albigenses and Waldenses" S. R. Maitland.

[43]"Die Reformation und die älteren Refomparteien" Dr. Ludwig Keller.

Chapter VI

Churches at the Close of the Middle Ages

1300-1500

Influence of the brethren in other circles--Marsiglio of Padua--The Guilds--Cathedral builders--Protest of the cities and guilds--Waltier in Cologne--Thomas Aquinas and Alvarus Pelagius--Literature of the brethren destroyed--Master Eckart--Tauler--The "Nine Rocks"--The Friend of God from the Oberland--Renewal of persecution--Strassburg document on persistence of the churches--Book in Tepl--Old Translation of German New Testament--Fanaticism--Capture of Constantinople--Invention of Printing--Discoveries--Printing Bibles--Colet, Reuchlin--Erasmus and the Greek New Testament--Hope of peaceful Reformation--Resistance of Rome--Staupitz discovers Luther.

The influence of the Waldensian Apostles and the testimony of the "brethren" affected circles far wider than those with which they were definitely associated, and in the first half of the fourteenth century their teachings prevailed to an extent never known before.

In 1302 Pope Boniface VIII issued a Bull declaring that submission to the Roman Pope was, for every human being, necessary to his soul's salvation. From this the consequence was decreed that there is no God-given authority in the world apart from that which is derived from the Pope. The Emperor, Ludwig of Bavaria, headed the protests that such claims aroused, and the Pope placed the greater part of the empire under an interdict.

[Marsiglio of Padua c. 1270-1342]

An important factor in the conflict was the writings of Marsiglio of Padua,[44] whom the Emperor protected and trusted, in spite of the Pope's declaring him to be the worst heretic he had ever read. Born in Padua (1270), Marsiglio studied at the University in Paris, where he greatly distinguished himself. In 1324 he published his "Defensor Pacis", in which he shows very clearly, according to Scripture, the relations between the State and the Church. He says it has become usual to apply the word Church to the ministers of the Church, bishops, priests and deacons. This is opposed to the Apostolic use of the word, according to which the Church is the assembly, or the total of those who believe in Christ. In this sense Paul writes to the Corinthians, "Unto the church of God which is at Corinth" (1 Cor. 1. 2). It is not by an oversight, he points out, that an improper use of the word has been adopted, but on well-considered grounds, which have great value for the priesthood but destructive consequences for Christianity. It is with the help of this false assumption, and the special passages of Scripture which are misused to support it, that that hierarchical system has been built up, which now, contrary to the Holy Scriptures and the commands of Christ, takes to itself the highest judicial power, not only in spiritual but also in earthly matters, whereas the highest authority, from which bishops and priests must receive theirs, is the Christian church, and no teacher or shepherd has the right to compel obedience by force or by punishment in this world.

Who then has the right to appoint bishops, pastors and ministers generally? For the Apostles, Christ was the source of authority; for their successors, the Apostles; after the death of the Apostles the right of choice went over to the congregations of the believers. The Book of the Acts gives an example in the choice of Stephen and Philip. If in the presence of the Apostles it was the church that chose, how much more must this way be observed after their death?

[The Guilds]

The Christian churches and their teachings spread most rapidly among the people of the great cities, and especially among the members of the different workmen's and trade guilds. In Italy and France the brethren were often called "Weavers", it being said as a reproach that they were mostly hand-workers and even their teachers were weavers and shoemakers. These guilds were very powerful, and had their ramifications in all countries, from Portugal to Bohemia and from England to Sicily. Each had its own elaborate organization and they were also interrelated. They had a religious as well as a technical character, and the reading of Scripture and prayer had an important place in their functions. One of the most powerful was that of the Masons, which included the many kinds of workers connected with building. We have evidence of the power and importance of this guild in the wonderful beauty, grace, and strength of the numerous cathedrals and churches, town halls and houses, which were built in the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries, and still give to Europe an inimitable interest and charm.

In the builders' huts around the cathedrals that were growing up, the Master would read the Scriptures, even in times when elsewhere the mere possession of a Bible was punishable with death. Large numbers of people who had nothing to do with building--ladies, shopkeepers, and others--became members of the guild on payment of a nominal contribution, it might be but a pot of honey or a bottle of wine. Such members were sometimes more numerous than the actual workpeople, finding in the guild a refuge from persecution, and opportunity for hearing the Word of God. The artistic value and varied beauty of most handiwork at that time was largely inspired by the spiritual passion which lay behind the patient technical skill of the worker.

The cities of the Empire and the guilds supported the Emperor Ludwig in his conflict with the Pope, and they suffered severely under the Interdict. In 1332 a number of cities addressed a letter to the Archbishop of Treves. They declared that the Emperor Ludwig of all the princes of the world lived most according to the teaching of Christ, and that in faith, as well as in modest resignation, he shone as an example to others. "We shall at all times", they said, "unto death", hold to him in firm and unchangeable fidelity, springing from faith, attachment and sincere obedience to him as our true Emperor and natural lord. No sufferings, no changes, no circumstances of any kind will ever separate us from him." They go on to illustrate the right relations between Church and State by the sun and moon, express the most painful regret that ambition of earthly honour had disturbed these relations, deny the Papal claim to be the only source of authority, and as "poor Christians" beg and pray that no further harm may be done to the Christian faith.

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net