

Dr. Kevin E. Frederick, Waldensians, Lecture 4, A Radical Distinction, The Role of Poverty

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This is Dr. Kevin Frederick in his teaching on the history of the Waldensians. This is session 4, A Radical Distinction, The Role of Poverty.

The sermon title is A Radical Distinction, and the scripture passage I'm choosing for this one is Acts 4:32 to 37.

Now, the whole group of those who believed were of one heart and soul. No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, but everything they owned was held in common. With great power, the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

Great grace was upon them all. There was not a needy person among them, for as many as own lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of that which was sold. They laid it on the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as had any need.

There was a Levite, a native of Cyprus, Joseph, to whom the apostles gave the name Barnabas, which means son of encouragement. He sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money and laid it at the apostles' feet. It's the word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God. In the first decades of the Christian movement, following the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, small groups of believers began to pattern their lives after the teachings of Jesus by advocating for a communal way of life, marked by the sharing of all possessions and the resources and a mutual spirit of humility. The biblical writer of Luke-Acts reports that those believers in Christ who owned lands and houses had sold their goods and assets and provided their resources to the apostles, who had distributed their resources to the poor so that no one in their community of faith had need.

This communal response of the early church was perceived as faithfully living by the call to Christian discipleship at a time when the community of faith anticipated the imminent return of the Lord. However, as years turned into decades and the second coming of Christ had not occurred, the fervent adherence to this principle of shared resources and communal living was relaxed in Christian communities of faith. By the 11th century, standard practices within the church had rendered it corrupt and poorly led.

The authority of church officials was widely questioned, both within the church and by the populace at large. During the reign of Pope Gregory VII, from 1073 to 1085,

these practices were brought under scrutiny, resulting in an overarching system of ecclesial reforms called the Gregorian Reform. At question were two primary practices of appointing church leadership, including lay investiture, the appointment of leaders by secular leaders, and also the practice of simony, the purchase of ecclesiastical office.

Simony was also a practice used by the church to grant lands to vassals who had paid the church for their use. Both lay investiture and simony led to the moral decline of the church hierarchy. Its ineffectiveness impacted every level, resulting in a growing mistrust of church leadership by the rest of medieval society.

Basing his ruling on the Gospel of John's description of a church leader as a shepherd in John 10, both lay investiture and simony were prohibited by the pope in the Gregorian Reform. As a means of ensuring the purity of the ordained offices of the church, the Gregorian Reform required all church leaders to be celibate. As part of a means of assuring accountability of the clergy, Pope Gregory encouraged the laity to be openly critical of the immoral practices of priests and bishops.

Out of this emerged the widely disseminated belief that all sacraments performed by simoniacs or those who were ordained by simoniacs were invalid and that reordinations of those same clergy were necessary. Pope Gregory's encouragement of the practice of criticizing the validity of immoral church leaders would come back to haunt the Roman church and cripple its authority in the eyes of the secular world in generations yet to come. By the early 13th century, many followers of Waldo would refuse the sacraments offered by priests and bishops who had been shown to have questionable morals.

This practice is known as Donatism. Gregorian Reform set in motion a critique of the Roman church, which would gain momentum throughout the 12th century A.D. A growing number of biblical scholars trained by the Roman Catholic Church also began to challenge the church's practice of accumulating wealth and property holdings on biblical and ethical grounds. A particular condemnation was a lavish lifestyle adopted by the Catholic hierarchy, which stood in sharp contrast to the poverty of the vast majority of the population.

Those church leaders who served in the name of the Lord, who himself had suffered and died for humanity, were by their wealth and gluttony far removed from the teachings of Jesus Christ and the sufferings of the everyday life circumstances of their parishioners. In the early decades of the 12th century, Peter Abelard was one such Catholic scholar who began to raise these issues within the circles of scholarly debate in the church. Based on a critique of the church's accumulation of wealth and the gluttonous living of its leaders, as articulated by Abelard and other biblical scholars, the rise of an emphasis on communal living within the Waldensian movement began.

In its second decade of existence, poor Leon and their preaching travelers encountered another aberrant Christian group known as the Poor of Lombardy, which focused its emphasis on communal living and the education of the laity. As previously stated, the Catholic hierarchy was amongst the wealthiest in 12th-century Europe. Amassing personal wealth tended to promote an indulgence of a number of sins amongst the church leaders, including sexual immorality, drunkenness, and indifference to the suffering of many in society.

Consequently, throughout the 12th century in Western Europe, a number of movements emerged in opposition to the lewd and immoral practices of church leaders. These opposing movements included the Petrobuscians, the Henrykins, the Humiliati, the Arnoldisti, and the Cathars. Generally speaking, these oppositional movements each adopted a vow of poverty and patterned their lives on the teachings and lifestyles of Jesus Christ.

Of these groups, the Arnoldisti emerged in the 13th century with Waldo and the Poor of Leon. The Arnoldists were followers of a man believed by a Roman Catholic scholar and monk called Arnold from Brescia, a small Lombard community near Milan in northern Italy. Arnold had been born in 1090 and had been a student of the great scholar Peter Abelard.

Like Abelard was critical of the amassed wealth of the Roman church and of the licentious immorality demonstrated by bishops and priests. However, unlike Abelard, Arnold was not content with merely discussing theological beliefs in a scholarly fashion. As a man of action, he felt the truth within his heart as well as in his mind and practiced and wanted others to practice a life dominated by the clean, purifying, democratic spirit of Christ.

Arnold broke from Abelard, returning to Brescia in the early 1130s, preaching his message for more than 20 years in the town regions throughout Lombardy. He centered his unifying message on the teachings of Jesus, especially found in Matthew 25:31 to 46, in which Jesus exhorts his followers to feed the poor, clothe the naked, and visit the sick. He also emphasized the nature of Christian communal living in Acts 2:44 to 47 and Acts 4:32 to 37, which described the Christian community devoting to sharing its resources amongst the whole community.

Arnold preached this message of shared resources, of taking care of the least of these, my brothers and sisters, among other moral reforms revealed in the Acts of the Apostles. As opposed to the Roman Catholic Church's use of the Vulgate, the Latin translation of the Bible, Arnold availed the Gospel message to his followers in the vernacular. Arnold's preaching posed a great threat to the Roman Church and its insistence on the use of the Vulgate as the only church-sanctioned translation of the Bible.

Because he was openly critical of the Church for its accumulation of wealth as flaunted by the lavish style of its hierarchy, Arnold vociferously called on the Church to turn over its church lands to the city-states. In his own words, clerics who own property, bishops who hold regalia and royal land grants, and monks who have possessions cannot possibly be saved. These challenges proved to be a great threat to the Roman Catholic Church.

Consequently, Arnold was condemned as a heretic, an enemy of the Church, and was burned at the stake in Rome in 1155, almost 20 years before Waldo would begin his ministry. Despite his health, his message and the communities which followed him endured in Lombardy. The Arnoldists had established vibrant, albeit small, Christian communities, which were still in operation thirty years later when Waldo's itinerant travels brought him to the Lombard region.

Before 1184, the issues of Valdes for church hierarchy were pastoral ones, conflict between a very potent intercall to missionary poverty and the ritual legal rights of an institutional clergy. Valdes and his followers were expected to submit their zeal to the jurisdiction of a hierarchy that did not share their fervent aspiration to apostolic poverty and their reborn sense of mission. In his refusal to submit to the papal decrees, Valdes and his followers remained an unbridled threat to the authority of the Church.

Because of this, in 1184, Waldo was branded as schismatic and banished from Lyon. In response, the followers of Waldo adopted the gospel motto of being sent out in pairs to preach and teach the gospel. Waldo and his followers, preaching companion, traveled east.

And as we've said before, that was part of the connections that they established there in the Lombardy region. The poor of Lombardy based their organization after the early Christian communities found in Acts 4 and 5 and on practical examples of ministry articulated in the epistles of James and Paul's letter to Timothy. The poor of Lombardy brought a degree of practicality and sustainability to their lifestyles not found in Waldo's movement.

The common bond of both the poor of Lyon and the poor of Lombardy was their commitment to a life of poverty, becoming devoted disciples of Jesus Christ. By the year 1205, these two groups had affiliated with each other but remained distinctly different in their focus. Whereas Waldo insisted on a unilateral focus on preaching and accepting alms offered by the listening audience as a sole means to sustenance, the poor of Lombardy insisted on each adult working for welfare of everyone in the community.

As a result, the question of labor was a primary point of contention between the two groups. Each member of the poor of Lombardy developed his or her own trades and skills to offer their talents for the community's well-being. In later generations, having a viable trade would come to serve the Waldensian preachers well when the Inquisition pushed them toward secrecy as a means of survival.

During the early decades of the existence of the poor of Lyon, a Roman Catholic scholar who was well-versed in the use of Latin joined the poor of Lyon and provided the movement with the intellectual integrity and the deep theological grounding that it needed. This scholar's name was Durand of Huesca. His greatest contribution was a manuscript written to guide the poor of Lyon and their missionary work of preaching against the heretical Cathars in southern France.

The Cathars were a heretical offshoot of Christianity, which espoused a dualistic interpretation of the nature of God. They taught that the God of the Old Testament was evil and that everything belonging to the physical realm was by its nature evil. In contrast, the Cathars believed that the God of the New Testament was good.

The Cathars preached that Jesus could not be a physical human being because all physical beings were, by their nature, evil. Instead, they believed that Jesus was a spiritual being who did not actually suffer. The implications of this erroneous belief system will be addressed in a separate sermon in a treatise called the *Liber Antiheresis*.

Durand provided a highly developed theological outline and set of instructions for the poor of Lyon in the *Liber Antiheresis* to effectively counter the errant beliefs of the Cathars and win back the populace to the Mother Church. *Liber Antiheresis* was Durand's greatest contribution to the Waldensian movement, providing solid theological focus to the movement. This document was even appreciated by many Roman Catholic priests and bishops as an effective tool in the church's battle against the heresy of Catharism.

The year following the death of Waldo in 1206-1207, Durand of Huesca began to put great personal effort into reunifying Waldo's followers with the Roman Catholic Church. However, his efforts to reunite the Waldensian movement with the Mother Catholic Church eventually proved unsuccessful. As a result of the insistence of the followers of Waldo to publicly preach in the vernacular, the Roman Catholic Church refused to acknowledge the right of the laity to preach and use a translation of the Bible in the vernacular and excommunicated all followers of Waldo.

Durand of Huesca and a number of his followers were more moderate than the followers of Waldo, and therefore, they were willing to compromise with Rome. Durand held the belief that unity with the Mother Church was of greater value than

the right to preach. He and a group of his allies reunited with the Roman Catholic Church in 1208.

For a brief period, Durand believed it possible to reunify the poor of Lyon and the Roman Catholics. But after unsuccessful attempts to serve as a bridge of unification between the two, Durand advocated starting a new movement within the Roman Catholic Church called the Poor Catholics. In 1208, the papacy approved the formation of the Poor Catholics as a means of redirecting the popularity and momentum of the laity towards a vow of poverty and away from Waldo's followers, back towards the Roman Church.

Within a few years after the authorization of the Poor Catholics by the Roman Church, a young convert named Francis of Assisi disavowed his family wealth and sought to fulfill an ordained calling within the church by embracing a vow of poverty. The church hierarchy saw Francis of Assisi as a credible resource through which to integrate the principles behind the organization of the Poor Catholics within the greater church. As a result, the papacy chose to establish a new monastic order under the leadership of Francis of Assisi.

By adopting many of the same principles developed by Waldo and the Arnoldists, the Franciscan order, which started in 1212, embraced poverty, humility, and a life of servanthood within their group. Like the Poor of Lombardy, the Franciscans emphasized the importance of educating their followers through the adoption of a lifestyle modeled after Jesus Christ. It would be historically misleading to suggest that Francis of Assisi and the Franciscan movement modeled itself directly after Waldo and the Poor of Lyon.

Much of Francis's emphasis came out of his own exploration of scriptures, but Francis grew up in Tuscany, where the message and influence of Waldo's movement were preached and widely disseminated. That fact, along with the return of Durand to the mother church and his establishment of the Poor Catholics within the Roman church, created fertile ground for the principles of a sanctioned church order modeled on the suffering humanity and poverty of Jesus to take hold within the Roman church. Still, though, the church resisted a full adoption of the laity-led evangelistic emphasis of the Poor of Lyon.

There is evidence to suggest that had it not been for the widely popular and rapidly spreading evangelistic ministry of the Poor of Lyon in their first 30 years of existence, and the church may not have created the Order of Franciscans. It was precisely because the Poor of Lyon and the Poor of Lombardy, derogatorily referred to by the Roman Catholic inquisitors as Waldenses, were theologically aligned closely with many of the core beliefs of the Roman Catholic church that their evangelism efforts had a far greater impact on the public than in any of the contemporary religious movements. The widespread impact of their message of Christian faith became the

predominant reason why the Roman Catholics sought to destroy the followers of Waldo.

An anonymous but well-informed ecclesiastical inquisitor claimed in a treatise first composed in the 1260s that the Waldenses were the most dangerous of all the heretical groups faced by the church. This proclamation, embraced by the church hierarchy, was due to several reasons, including the widespread and very popular acceptance of the message, the criticism of the church leaders amassing wealth, and the fact that the Poor of Lyon adhered to every theological belief of the Roman church—finally, the effectiveness of their simple preaching in the language of the people instead of Latin.

It is worth noting that within 50 years after Waldo started his movement in Lyon, the Roman Catholic church responded to Waldo's call to preach the Word of God in public settings by creating its own official order, the Dominicans Dedicated to Proclamation of the Word, called the *Ordo Praedicatorum*. The second emphasis, as previously mentioned, was the creation of the Franciscan order dedicated to avowing poverty. But there was one crucial difference between the Catholic church of the early 13th century and the Waldensians as they approached these two foundational elements of ministry.

Initially, the Catholic church kept the religious emphasis on proclamation and poverty separated by assigning the proclamation of the Word of God in the vernacular initially to the Dominicans and the Benedictines, whereas the religious emphasis on avow of poverty was adopted by the Franciscans. It must be recognized that the Waldensians were the first organized Christian ministry where these two elements were integrated and embodied in the model of leadership. This distinction of separation allowed the Roman Catholic church to keep its wealth protected and unchallenged, diminishing the integrity of the message of the gospel by failing to recognize the threat that blind allegiance to wealth and property brought to the Christian witness of the Roman church.

It was the poor Christ serving as disciples of Jesus Christ who lived an integrated life of itinerant preaching and poverty, whose growing popularity the papacy could no longer ignore, that caused the church to establish a set of Catholic orders where both poverty and preaching were integrated. In the 1220s, with the papal organization of the *Ordo Praedicatorum*, the establishment of the Catholic preaching orders authorized Franciscans, Benedictines, and Dominicans to embrace a vow of poverty and preach in the language of the people. And yet, the vast majority of the priests and bishops were not devoted to these holy orders and were not bound by them.

It would be another 300 years before an integrative emphasis on the integrity of the message and lifestyle of ordained Christian leaders would emerge beyond the limited influence of these three Catholic orders and the Waldensian movement in Western

Europe. Not until Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation in the early 16th century did that occur. Finally, it's worth noting that the origins of a focus on the poverty and humility of Christ can be traced visually in the Christian art that was produced in this era of time.

Prior to the 13th century, the dominant visual Christological emphasis communicated by the Roman Catholic Church about the nature of Jesus Christ was that of Pantocrator, the risen Christ as Lord of the universe. Christ as Pantocrator was symbolized with a preponderance of gold and white paint which communicated the mighty and triumphal presence of a risen Lord as an image of the universal reign of Christ. This emphasis upon Christ as Lord over all nations and creation dramatically changed with the societal and ecclesial challenges directed against the wealth and power of the church in the 13th century.

With the growth and rise of the Franciscan movement in the Roman church by the mid-13th century, the Franciscans brought the humanity and the suffering of Jesus to the forefront of the visual arts within the Catholic church. As a result, much of the Roman Catholic church's artistic interpretation devoted to the subject of Jesus Christ from that point forward began to emphasize the humanity and the suffering nature of Jesus. The emphasis on the crucifix, the image of the suffering Jesus on a cross, was a significant contribution of the Franciscan movement into Roman Catholicism.

During this era of time, this attention to the humanity of Jesus also impacted the church's emphasis on corporate worship and was developed in the creation of liturgical resources and theological documents devoted to Catholic Christology. Down through history, critics of the church from both within and beyond the Christian faith have done much to redirect the focus to the essentials of the faith. Waldo, Arnold, and Francis of Assisi each helped to preserve the essential theological emphasis of the Christian faith, challenging the church.

In the name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

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