

Dr. Kevin E. Frederick, Waldensians, Session 7, Circling Back to Truth – Women Preachers (1180-1980's) Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Frederick, Waldensians, Session 7, Circling Back to Truth – Women Preachers, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Kevin Frederick's lecture explores the historical role of women preachers within the **Waldensian movement**, beginning with their early participation in ministry during the **twelfth century**. The lecture highlights the scriptural basis used to support women's leadership and the subsequent shift in their roles due to **persecution by the Roman Church**, leading to the formation of **sorores** focused on hospitality and support. It further examines the **twentieth-century debates** within the Waldensian Church regarding the ordination of women, including the arguments against and eventual acceptance, culminating in the ordination of the first female pastors in **1967**.

2. 18 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Frederick, Waldensians, Session 7 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → Waldensians).



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3. Briefing Document: Frederick, Waldensians, Session 7, Circling Back to Truth – Women Preachers

Briefing Document: Waldensian Perspectives on Women in Ministry

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Kevin Frederick's lecture on the history of Waldensian women preachers. The lecture traces the evolving roles of women in the Waldensian movement, from their early participation in preaching alongside men in the 12th century to their later, less visible but crucial roles during periods of persecution, and finally to the 20th-century journey towards the ordination of women.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. Early Waldensian Practice of Women Preaching (12th-13th Centuries):

- **Shared Ministry:** At the beginning of Waldo's ministry in the 12th century, both men and women actively preached.
- **Scriptural Basis:** Early Waldensians found scriptural support for women in leadership roles by referencing passages such as:
 - **Mark 16:** The women (Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome) were the first to witness the resurrected Christ and were instructed to "go, tell his disciples and Peter." Dr. Frederick highlights Jesus' direct command to Mary Magdalene to "go and tell my brothers."
 - **Galatians 3:23-29:** This passage emphasizes the equality of believers in Christ: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." This was seen as an underlying principle of equality.
- **Public Proclamation:** By 1180, there is documented evidence of Waldensian women preaching publicly. Geoffrey of Auxerre, secretary of Bishop Bernard of Clairvaux, condemned two Waldensian women in Clermont for preaching and criticizing the bishop.
- **Content of Preaching:** Their message involved reciting scripture in the vernacular and urging people to "denounce sin and repent of their wrongs."
- **Threat to the Roman Church:** Even this basic proclamation was viewed as a "serious and vital threat" by the Roman Church.

2. Suppression and Shifting Roles Due to Persecution (Mid-13th Century - Reformation):

- **Violent Persecution:** As a "direct result of violent persecutions against Waldensian women by the Roman Church," they were forced to adopt less visible roles.
- **Emergence of "Sorores" (Sisterhood):** Waldensian women formed groups called "sorores" (sisters), focusing their ministry on establishing a network of hospices.
- **Hospice Ministry:** These hospices, managed by women, provided hospitality to the poor, sick, and indigent women.
- **Support for Itinerant Ministers ("Barba"):** The sorores also began to provide accommodations and support for the "barba," the itinerant Waldensian ministers, eventually contributing to the development of early Waldensian seminaries.
- **Equal Partnership:** The title "sorores" conveyed the "equal partnership of women with the men who were charged with the more visible call of spreading the gospel." This partnership was "indispensable to the witness of the Waldensian community of faith."

3. Impact of the Reformation and Changing Ministry Focus (16th Century Onward):

- **Shift to Fixed Communities:** With the Reformation, the Waldensians moved from itinerant evangelism to serving as pastors in geographically fixed communities with houses of worship.
- **External Seminary Training:** Waldensian preachers began training in Geneva, Switzerland, rather than in Waldensian seminaries.
- **Decline of Sorores' Importance:** The ministry of the sorores and their direct support for itinerant preachers diminished in importance.
- **Lasting Influence:** Despite this shift, the legacy of the sorores can be seen in the Waldensian emphasis on education, hospitality houses ("forestaria"), and ministry to the poor and marginalized, which Dr. Frederick equates to "diaconal ministries" today.

4. 20th Century and the Path to Ordination of Women (Post-World War II - 1967):

- **Changing Societal Roles:** The changing role of women in society (entering the workforce) and a decline in men entering the pastorate prompted the Waldensian Church to address the issue of female vocations.

- **Early Studies and Bias:** Initial studies by the Tavola Valdes (administrative board) in 1948 focused on "feminine ministries" and particular gifts of women for auxiliary roles (Sunday school, youth groups, visitation) rather than equal participation in ordained ministry. This reinforced a "prejudice that categorized certain lesser functions of ministry" for women.
- **Establishment of "Church Assistants":** By 1954, the Synod established the role of "church assistants," women who could work with male clergy in specific areas.
- **Stereotypical Arguments:** Debates in the Synod were dominated by men who often raised "stereotypical arguments about women and against their gifts as ordained ministers."
- **Emergence of Women's Voices:** Towards the end of the 1950s, women began to attend Synod meetings and, after encouragement, started to voice their perspectives, highlighting the need for a "well-developed position on the matter, expressing a commonly agreed upon women's perspective."
- **Professor Giovanni Miegge's Pivotal Role:** Professor Miegge, leading the study, recognized Galatians 3:28 as a central principle of equality, stating in 1949 that "the church has the full right, if not the duty, to adjust our understanding of women's ministry, forwarding the absolute principle of equality in Galatians 3:28." He urged the church to experiment with women in ministry.
- **Experimentation and Positive Outcomes:** In 1959, Ms. Carmen Trobia Ceteroni, an auxiliary church worker, was given full responsibility for a church over the summer, which proved to be a positive experience.
- **Formal Advocacy and Debate:** In 1960, the Waldensian Women's Federation formally advocated for the ordination of women. This coincided with a debate about the very need for ordained ministers, leading to discussions about the qualities required for the pastorate.
- **Addressing Objections:** The Tavola addressed various objections raised against women's ordination, including concerns about women gaining authority over men (authority comes from Scripture and the office, not gender), women's capacity for the responsibilities (men face similar challenges), masculinization of women (emphasizing the priesthood of all believers), and economic concerns ("women pastors will always be in the minority").
- **Historic Decision:** In 1962, the Waldensian Church voted to open ordination to women.

- **First Ordinations:** In August 1967, the first two seminary-trained female Waldensian pastors, including Ms. Carmen Trobia, were ordained.

5. Rediscovering the Early History:

- **Late Discovery:** Dr. Frederick notes that the early practice of women preaching in the 12th and 13th centuries was "apparently unknown by the church leadership until recent decades," with the first study of the ancient church not conducted until 1962.
- **Radical Early Adherence to Scripture:** This rediscovery highlights how "radically guided the first-generation Waldensians were in their adherence and practice of Holy Scripture" in challenging the Roman Catholic Church.
- **Delayed Recognition:** Dr. Frederick expresses astonishment at "how long it has taken biblical scholars and church leaders to catch up with the dynamic witness of faith of the first generation of Waldensian men and women."
- **"Circling Back to Truth":** The title of the lecture emphasizes the idea that the modern Waldensian Church has, after centuries, returned to a more inclusive understanding of ministry that aligns with its earliest practices and interpretations of scripture.

Quotes:

- "Certainly, at the very beginning of their ministry, of Waldo's ministry, men and women preached in the twelfth century."
- "But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going ahead of you to Galilee." (Mark 16, quoted to highlight Jesus' instruction to women).
- "Therefore, there is no longer Jew or Greek, no longer slave or free, no longer male or female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus." (Galatians 3:28, central to the theological argument for equality).
- "As a direct result of violent persecutions against Waldensian women by the Roman Church, they began to assume roles that were less visible to the outside world but were every bit as essential to the living of their faith as a community of disciples."
- "The title *sorores* conveyed the role of the equal partnership of women with the men who were charged with the more visible call of spreading the gospel."

- "...the emphasis tended to reinforce a prejudice that categorized certain lesser functions of ministry...to female church workers. Men, on the other hand, were the ordained clergy..."
- "Miegge concluded in his 1949 report that the church has the full right, if not the duty, to adjust our understanding of women's ministry, forwarding the absolute principle of equality in Galatians 3:28."
- "We are convinced...that women pastors will always be in the minority." (Tavola Valdes, 1962).
- "Eight hundred years later, we've adopted the same progressive and faith-based orientation to this message of the gospel that our ancestors in faith recognized so long ago."
- "Women were proclaiming the gospel in public places as early as 1180."
- "These two women were denounced as heretics and later were labeled as prostitutes." (Referring to the Waldensian women preaching in Clermont).

Conclusion:

Dr. Frederick's lecture provides a comprehensive overview of the historical journey of Waldensian women in ministry. It highlights the early embrace of women preachers based on scriptural interpretation, the subsequent suppression and adaptation of their roles due to persecution, and the eventual, though debated, return to a more inclusive understanding of ordained ministry in the 20th century. The rediscovery of the early church's practices underscores the Waldensians' historical commitment to interpreting scripture directly and the long process of the broader church recognizing the full participation of women in ministry.

4. Study Guide: Frederick, Waldensians, Session 7, Circling Back to Truth – Women Preachers

Study Guide: Waldensian Women Preachers

Key Concepts

- **Waldo's Ministry:** The initial phase of the Waldensian movement in the 12th century, characterized by both men and women preaching.
- **Scriptural Basis for Women's Leadership:** The passages in Mark 16 concerning Mary Magdalene and other women being the first to witness and proclaim the resurrection, and Galatians 3:28 emphasizing equality in Christ.
- **Sorores:** Latin for "sisters," referring to the organized groups of Waldensian women who shifted their ministry focus in the face of persecution.
- **Hospices:** Centers established and managed by the sorores to provide hospitality to the poor, sick, indigent women, and eventually, accommodations for itinerant Waldensian ministers (barba).
- **Barba:** The itinerant Waldensian ministers who traveled and spread their beliefs.
- **Reformation Impact:** The shift in Waldensian ministry from itinerant evangelism to serving fixed congregations after joining the Protestant Reformation.
- **Tavola Valdes:** The administrative board of the Waldensian Church, similar to the General Assembly in Presbyterian churches, responsible for studying and addressing church issues.
- **Feminine Ministries vs. Women in Ministry:** The distinction made during the mid-20th century debates, where "feminine ministries" referred to auxiliary roles for women, while "women in ministry" addressed the possibility of ordained leadership.
- **Ordination of Women:** The process and eventual decision by the Waldensian Church in the late 1960s to allow women to become ordained pastors.
- **Medieval Church Response:** The opposition and persecution faced by Waldensian women preachers from the Roman Catholic Church in the 12th and 13th centuries.
- **Geoffrey of Auxerre:** Secretary of Bishop Bernard of Clairvaux who condemned Waldensian women preaching in the late 12th century.

- **Bernard of Fontcaude:** Writer in the late 12th and early 13th centuries who extensively opposed Waldensian women preachers, citing ecclesial law.
- **Priesthood of All Believers:** A Protestant concept suggesting that all Christians have direct access to God and share in the work of ministry.

Quiz

1. According to the lecture, what were the initial roles of women in Waldo's ministry during the 12th century?
2. Name two scriptural passages that the early Waldensians used to support their understanding of women taking on leadership roles in the church.
3. What were the sorores, and what was the primary focus of their ministry shift in response to persecution?
4. Explain the connection between the sorores and the development of what became Waldensian seminaries and schools.
5. How did the Protestant Reformation and the Waldensians joining the movement impact the ministry of the sorores and the training of the barba?
6. What were the two major shifts in the mid-20th century that prompted the Waldensian Church to re-examine the role of women in ministry?
7. Describe the distinction that was initially emphasized in the mid-20th century debates between "feminine ministries" and "women in ministry."
8. What was a significant concern raised against the ordination of women regarding authority, and how did the Tavola Valdes address this concern?
9. When did the Waldensian Church officially vote to open the doors to the ordination of women, and when were the first female pastors ordained?
10. What was Geoffrey of Auxerre's view of Waldensian women preachers, and what biblical figure did he compare them to?

Quiz Answer Key

1. At the beginning of Waldo's ministry in the 12th century, both men and women actively preached the Waldensian faith. This was a defining characteristic of their early movement.

2. The early Waldensians looked to Mark 16, where Mary Magdalene and other women were the first to be told of Jesus' resurrection and instructed to tell the disciples, and Galatians 3:28, which states that in Christ there is no longer male nor female.
3. The *sorores* were organized groups of Waldensian women (Latin for "sisters") who, due to violent persecutions, shifted their ministry from public preaching to establishing and managing hospices. These hospices provided care for the poor, sick, and indigent women.
4. Over time, the hospices run by the *sorores* began to offer accommodations and support for the itinerant Waldensian ministers, the *barba*. This eventually evolved into a system that served as a precursor to formal Waldensian seminaries and schools for training ministers.
5. After joining the Reformation, the Waldensians shifted from itinerant evangelism to having pastors serve geographically fixed congregations. Consequently, the ministry of the *sorores* in supporting traveling preachers became less central, and Waldensian preachers began training in Geneva rather than in a Waldensian seminary.
6. The two major shifts in the mid-20th century were the changing role of women in society, with more women entering the workforce and professions, and a significant decrease in the number of men interested in becoming pastors in the Waldensian Church.
7. The initial emphasis in the mid-20th century debates focused on "feminine ministries," which were seen as auxiliary roles suitable for women, such as leading Sunday school or women's groups. "Women in ministry," on the other hand, addressed the more significant issue of women serving as ordained clergy with the same responsibilities as men.
8. A significant concern raised was that women pastors would gain authority over men in the care of souls. The Tavola Valdes countered this by stating that a minister's authority comes from Scripture and the office of ministry, not from gender.
9. The Waldensian Church voted in the majority to open ordination to women in 1962. The first two seminary-trained female Waldensian pastors, including Ms. Carmen Trobia, were ordained in August 1967.

10. Geoffrey of Auxerre held a negative view of Waldensian women preachers, condemning them for preaching and publicly criticizing Bishop Bernard. He compared them to the false prophet Jezebel from the Book of Revelation, portraying them as wretched and impudent.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the scriptural arguments used by the early Waldensians to justify women's preaching and leadership roles. How did the medieval Roman Catholic Church counter these arguments?
2. Discuss the role and significance of the sorores in the Waldensian community, particularly in light of the persecution faced by women preachers in the 13th century. How did their ministry adapt and remain vital?
3. Examine the factors that led to the Waldensian Church's decision in the mid-20th century to ordain women. What were the key arguments for and against this decision, and how were the objections addressed?
4. Compare and contrast the initial understanding and practice of women's ministry in the early Waldensian movement with the debates and eventual acceptance of women's ordination in the mid-20th century. What continuities or discontinuities can be identified?
5. Evaluate the historical significance of Waldensian women preachers in the medieval period. How did their actions challenge the prevailing societal and religious norms, and what impact did their ministry have on the Waldensian movement and the broader history of women in Christian ministry?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Anoint:** To apply oil, often as part of a religious ceremony to signify consecration or healing.
- **Covenant:** A solemn agreement, often between God and humanity, involving promises and obligations.
- **Diaconal Ministries:** Forms of service within the church focused on caring for the needs of the community, particularly the poor and marginalized.
- **Ecclesial:** Relating to the church or its affairs.
- **Evangelical:** Relating to the proclamation of the Christian gospel or message.
- **Exhort:** To strongly encourage or urge someone to do something.
- **Heretic:** A person holding beliefs that contradict the official teachings of a religious doctrine.
- **Indigent:** Suffering from extreme poverty; needy.
- **Itinerant:** Traveling from place to place, often as part of one's ministry or work.
- **Marginalized:** Treated as insignificant or peripheral; excluded from the main body of society.
- **Ordained Clergy:** Individuals who have been formally recognized and authorized to perform religious duties, such as preaching and administering sacraments.
- **Pastorate:** The office or role of a pastor in a church.
- **Persecutions:** The systematic mistreatment and oppression of individuals or groups, often based on their religious beliefs.
- **Prophetess:** A woman who speaks by divine inspiration or interprets divine will.
- **Sacraments:** Religious ceremonies or acts regarded as outward and visible signs of inward and spiritual grace, especially baptism and communion.
- **Synod:** An assembly of clergy or other church officials for consultation or decision-making.
- **Vocation:** A strong feeling of suitability for a particular career or occupation, often with religious connotations.

5. FAQs on Frederick, Waldensians, Session 7, Circling Back to Truth – Women Preachers, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Waldensian Women and Preaching

1. What was the initial stance of the Waldensian movement, from its beginnings with Waldo in the 12th century, regarding women in ministry and preaching? From the very beginning of Waldo's ministry in the 12th century, both men and women actively preached the gospel. This early practice stemmed from the Waldensians' interpretation of scripture, particularly passages like Mark 16, which recounts Mary Magdalene and other women being the first witnesses to the resurrection and being instructed to tell the disciples, and Galatians 3:28, which declares that in Christ there is no longer male nor female. These passages were seen as foundational for understanding women's leadership roles within the faith.

2. How did the role of women in the Waldensian movement evolve in the 13th century, and what factors contributed to this shift? By the second half of the 13th century, due to increasing violent persecutions specifically targeting Waldensian women by the Roman Church, their public preaching became less visible. Instead, women began to organize into groups called *sorores* (sisters). These groups focused their ministry on establishing and managing a network of hospices that provided hospitality to the poor, the sick, and indigent women. Over time, these hospices also began to accommodate and support itinerant Waldensian ministers (*barba*), eventually contributing to the development of Waldensian seminaries and schools. While less public, the work of the *sorores* was considered an equal partnership with the male ministers and was indispensable to the survival and witness of the Waldensian community.

3. How did the Reformation impact the ministry of women within the Waldensian movement? With the coming of the Reformation in the 16th century, the Waldensians transitioned from an itinerant form of evangelism to serving as pastors in geographically fixed communities with houses of worship. Waldensian preachers began to be trained in Geneva, Switzerland, rather than in Waldensian seminaries. As a result, the crucial role of the *sorores* in supporting and training itinerant preachers diminished in importance.

4. Despite the changes brought by the Reformation, what lasting impact did the ministry of the *sorores* have on the Waldensian church? The influence of the *sorores* can still be seen in the modern Waldensian church's emphasis on the importance of education for its members, the establishment of *foresteria* (Waldensian hospitality houses), and their ongoing commitment to ministry among the poor and marginalized. These aspects of Waldensian ministry can be traced back to the foundational work and focus of the *sorores*, which can be understood as early forms of diaconal ministries.

5. What factors led to the Waldensian church reconsidering and eventually ordaining women as pastors in the mid-20th century? Several factors contributed to this shift, including the changing role of women in broader society after World War II, with more women entering the workforce and professional fields. Additionally, there was a significant decrease in the number of men interested in serving as pastors. These issues prompted the Waldensian Synod to study the possibility of female vocations in the pastorate, starting in 1948.

6. What were some of the key arguments and debates surrounding the ordination of women in the Waldensian church in the mid-20th century, and how were these concerns addressed? Initial discussions often focused on "feminine ministries" rather than the full role of women in ordained ministry, sometimes perpetuating traditional gender roles. Concerns were raised about women gaining authority over men, the practical challenges for women in fulfilling the responsibilities of a minister, the potential "masculinization" of women in such roles, and economic concerns about competition for pastoral positions. The Tavola Valdes addressed these concerns by emphasizing that ministerial authority comes from Scripture and the office itself, not gender; that men in ministry face similar challenges; that ministry should be a shared responsibility of the whole church; and that women pastors were expected to remain a minority.

7. What pivotal theological understanding played a significant role in the eventual decision to ordain women? Professor Giovanni Miegge's early recognition of Galatians 3:28 ("There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female, for all of you are one in Christ Jesus") as a fundamental principle of equality in Christ was crucial. This passage was understood to signify a new creation in Christ where gender roles no longer hold the same significance in terms of spiritual standing and the ability to serve within the church.

8. What is the significance of the Waldensians' historical journey regarding women in ministry, and what does it reveal about their approach to scripture and tradition? The Waldensians' history demonstrates a remarkable "circling back to truth." Their early adoption of women preachers in the 12th and 13th centuries, based on their own interpretation of scripture, was a radical challenge to the prevailing norms of the Roman Catholic Church. The fact that this early history was later rediscovered and served as a precedent for the ordination of women in the 20th century highlights their commitment to interpreting scripture directly and their willingness to evolve their practices based on their understanding of the gospel message, even if it meant challenging long-held traditions. It underscores a progressive, faith-based approach to understanding and implementing their faith.