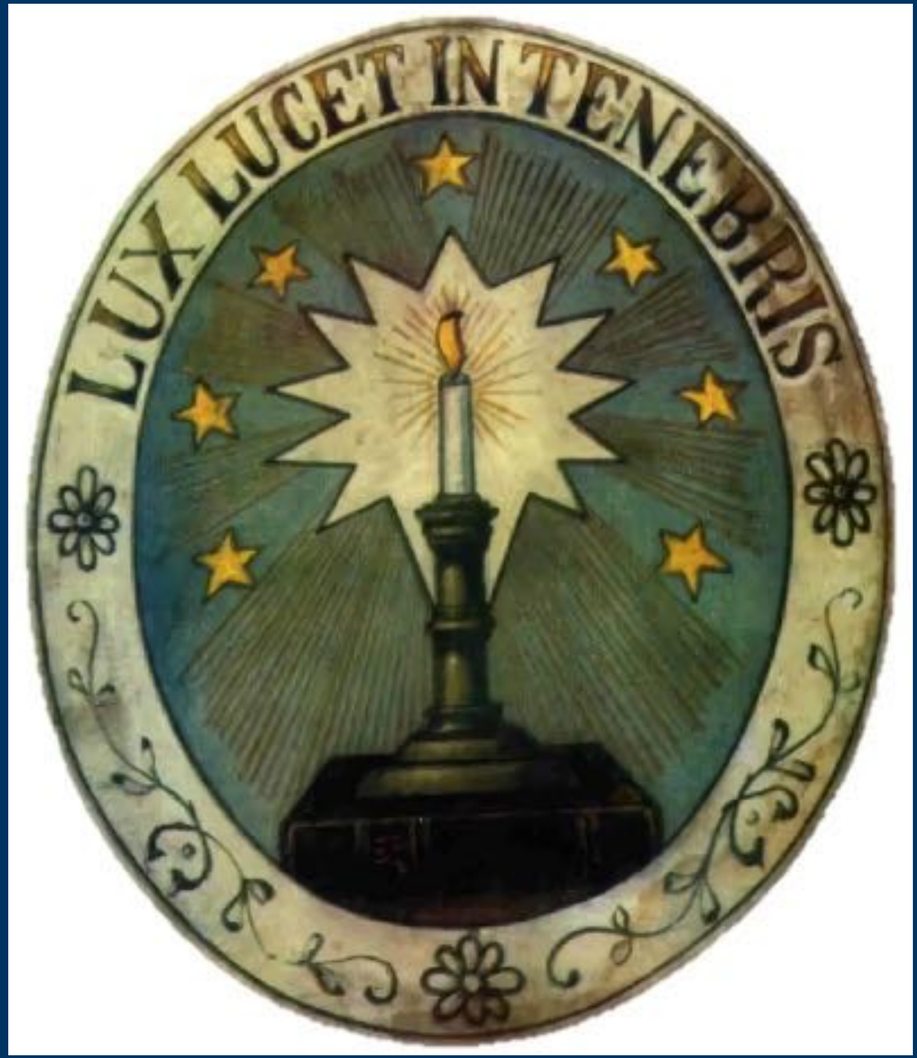
The Waldensians

A light out of Darkness



Reformation Sunday: Pre-Reformers

“Lux lucid in tenebrous”

“A light out of Darkness”

Do you believe in the holy Catholic Church?

No, for it is a creature,
but I believe that it exists.

What do you believe regarding the holy church?

The holy catholic church is made up of all of God's elect, from the beginning to the end. Who, according to the grace of God, by the merits of Christ, have been gathered together by the Holy Spirit.

…and have been previously ordained to eternal life, their number and names being known only to the One having chosen them.

Who were the Waldensians?

- Lux Lucid in tenebrous
  - They are a steady light, shining in the darkness.
- Sometimes called the ‘First Protestants’ or ‘the First Evangelicals’



The First Reformation

- Waldensian’s like to talk about what they called the ‘First Reformation’
- This was 300 years before Luther and Calvin
- In the 12th century we can go back and see the reformation of the church in the Waldensians



Life in the 12th-13th Century

- The crusades were still happening
  - 1096 was the first crusade
- The church split b/t East and West in 1054
- 3 Monastic orders were founded
  - **1112**: Bernard of Clairvaux (Cistercian Order-austerity and labor)
  - **1216**: Dominic de Guzman (Dominican Order-Traveling Preachers)
  - **1209**: Francis of Assisi (Franciscan Oder-Austerity and Preaching)
- Medieval Sacramental System



The Albigensians

- A Crusade was also happening against the Albigensians
  - A heretical group in the south of France (very near to the Waldensians)
  - Often confused with the Waldensians
  - Manichean, Gnostic, dualists (God and the demiurge)
    - The physical world is bad and evil
  - They also taught Christian message of perfection, poverty, and preaching



The Waldensians

- Another movement began between Lyon and Turin (modern France and modern Italy)
  - In the Italian Cottian Alps
- The only medieval sect that survived the persecution of the Middle Ages
  - Waldensians still exist today
- They came out of the Catholic Church, rather than having their own lineage



Peter Waldo (1140-1205)

- Peter Waldo lived in the city of Lyon, France
    - A Wealthy Merchant (an emerging social class)
        - Not a peasant, not an aristocrat
- He became convinced that God was calling him to give away his money and take up preaching (1170)
- He’s not a priest, but rather a ‘layman’
- He took up a life of ‘apostolic poverty’



Waldo's Ministry

- Similar to Francis of Assisi after him (not before)
    - He gave away all of his money to the poor
- He memorized portions of Scripture in the 'vernacular' of the people
- He memorized portions of the church fathers (Augustine)
- He would go out and preach, primarily reciting the Scriptures and quoting the church Fathers



The Poor Men of Lyon

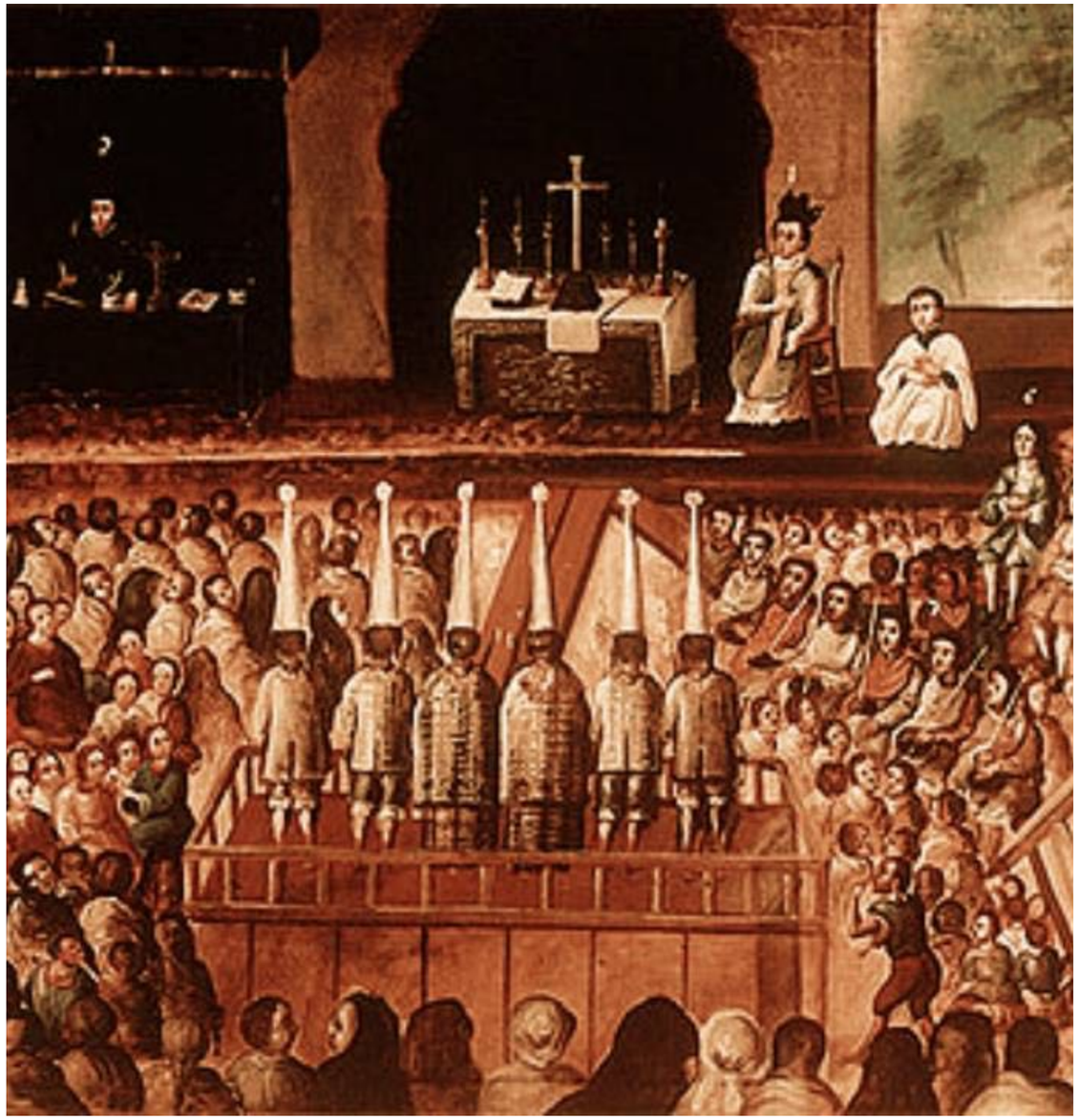
- Other people joined Peter in this movement and called themselves the ‘poor men of Lyon’
- Eventually, as the movement grew, they needed to apply to Rome for papal permission to exist as an order
  - Similar to the Dominicans or Franciscans
- Alexander III, the current Pope, was reluctant to endorse new movements b/c the new movements had the potential to challenge the authority of the church



Alexander III, Pope, AntiPope

Papal Examination

- Walter Map, the Bishop, in his examination was eager to establish himself as a theologian and inquisitor
    - He sought to ‘trap’ the Waldensians and ‘prove their heresy’
- He described them as very ‘simple and illiterate people’
- In fact, the Waldensians knew the scriptures very well, though they were not as learned in official Catholic Theology



“Do you believe in God the Father?”

“We believe.”

“Do you believe in God the Son?”

“We believe.”

“Do you believe in the Holy Spirit?”

“We believe.”

“And do you believe in the mother of Christ?”

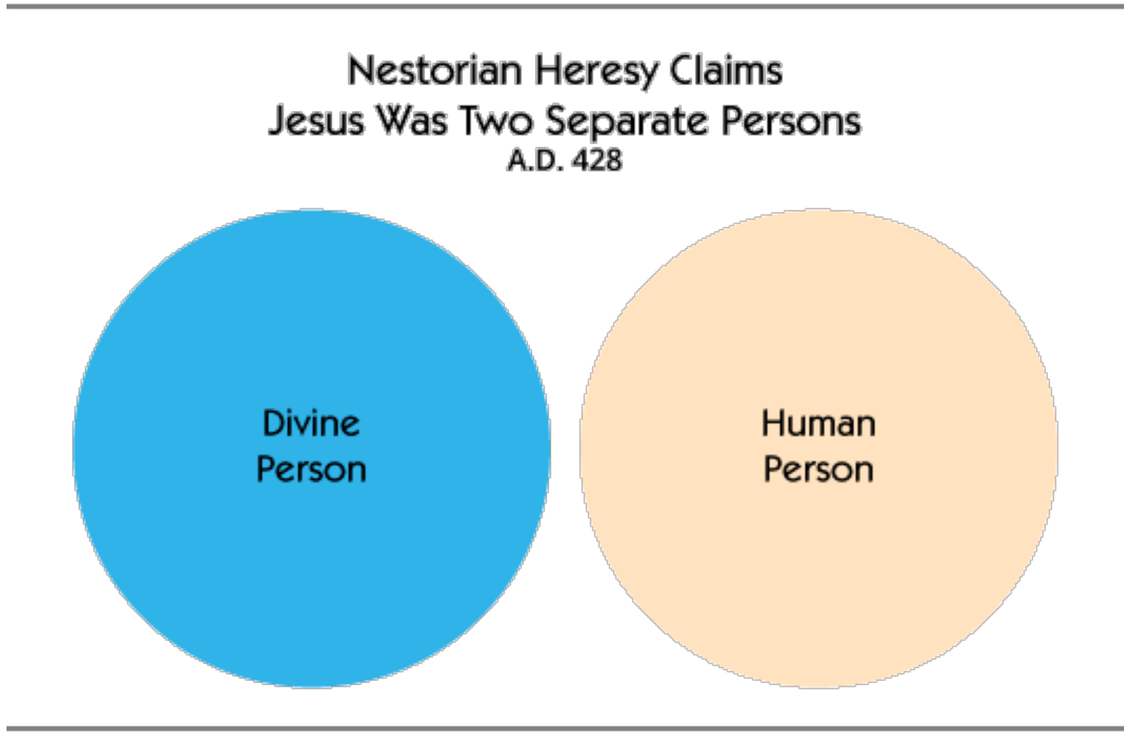
“We believe.”

Wrong Answer.

“No, we believe in the mother of God.”

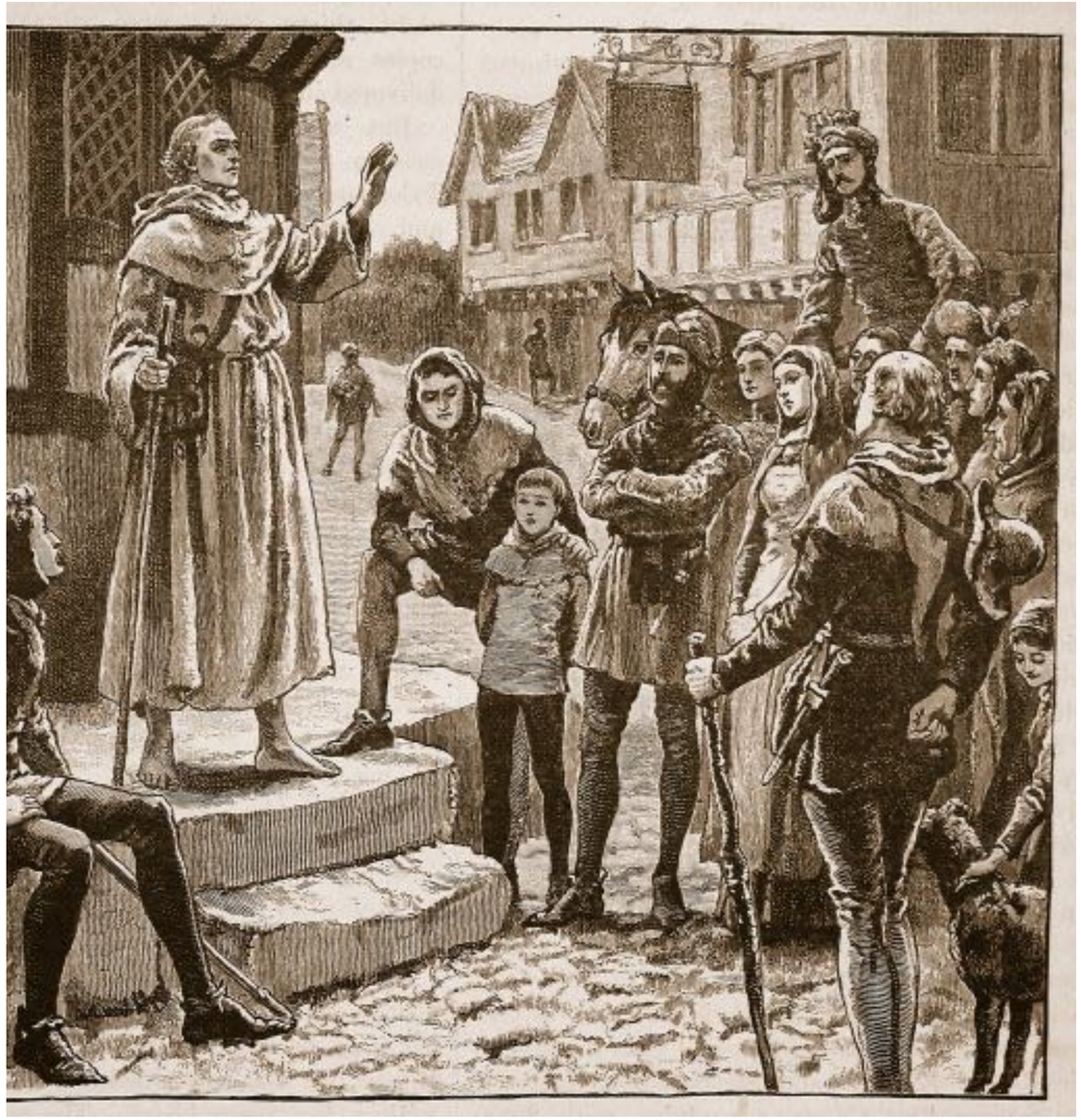
Papal Examination Concluded

- When the Bishop heard that answer, everyone present broke out into a ‘roar of laughter’
- He had set a trap for them, and they had fallen into it
- The Orthodox answer about ‘believing in the mother of God’ confirmed the deity of Christ, and was a major theological controversy in the 5th century
- The Nestorian answer was ‘we believe in the mother of Christ’ as they denied the full incarnation of Christ as both fully God and fully man
- The Waldensians were not heretics, but they did not know their church history as well as they knew their Bibles



Denied Approval

- The Roman Catholic Church denied their approval as an order
  - They could continue to be ‘poor’ and give away everything they had, but they were not allowed to preach
  - They could only ‘preach’ if the local clergy allowed them to
- They went back home to Lyon, and continued to preach
- They believed that the ‘authority to preach’ did not come from the Pope or from Bishops, but from Christ

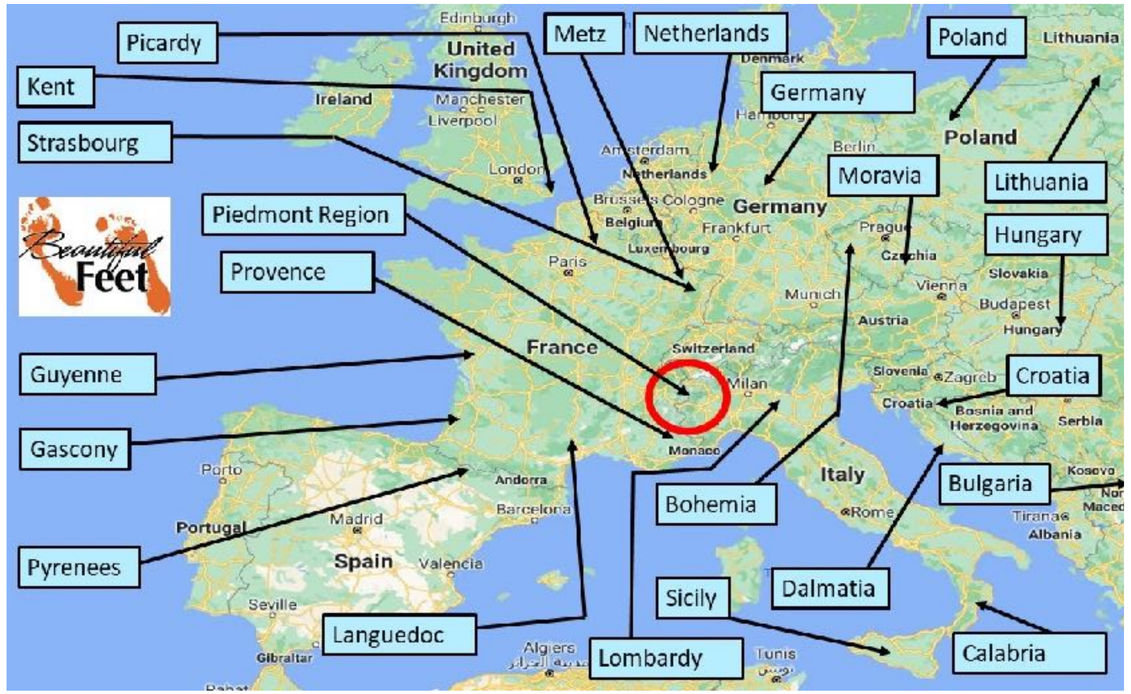


But Peter and the Apostles answered, “We must obey God rather than men.”

-Acts 5:29

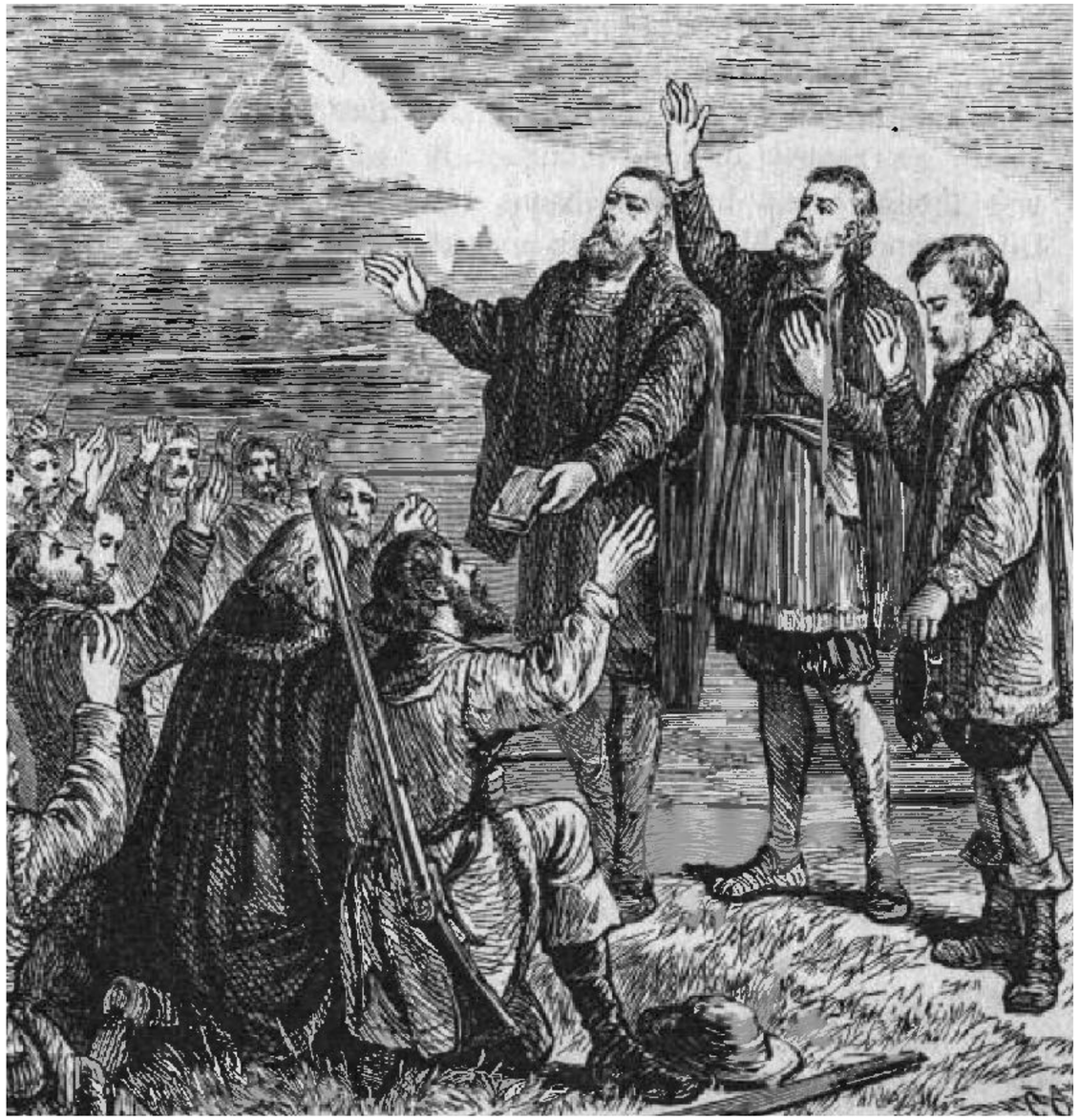
‘Peter’ Waldo

- These were the words of Peter when they were ordered not to preach by the Sanhedrin, the ruling council in Jerusalem
- He is later called ‘Peter’ Waldo because he often uses this text
  - It was not his original name
- After their refusal to ‘stop preaching’ they were expelled from Lyon by the archbishop
  - They were scattered by persecution (like the early church in Acts 9) all over Europe



Waldensian Evangelists

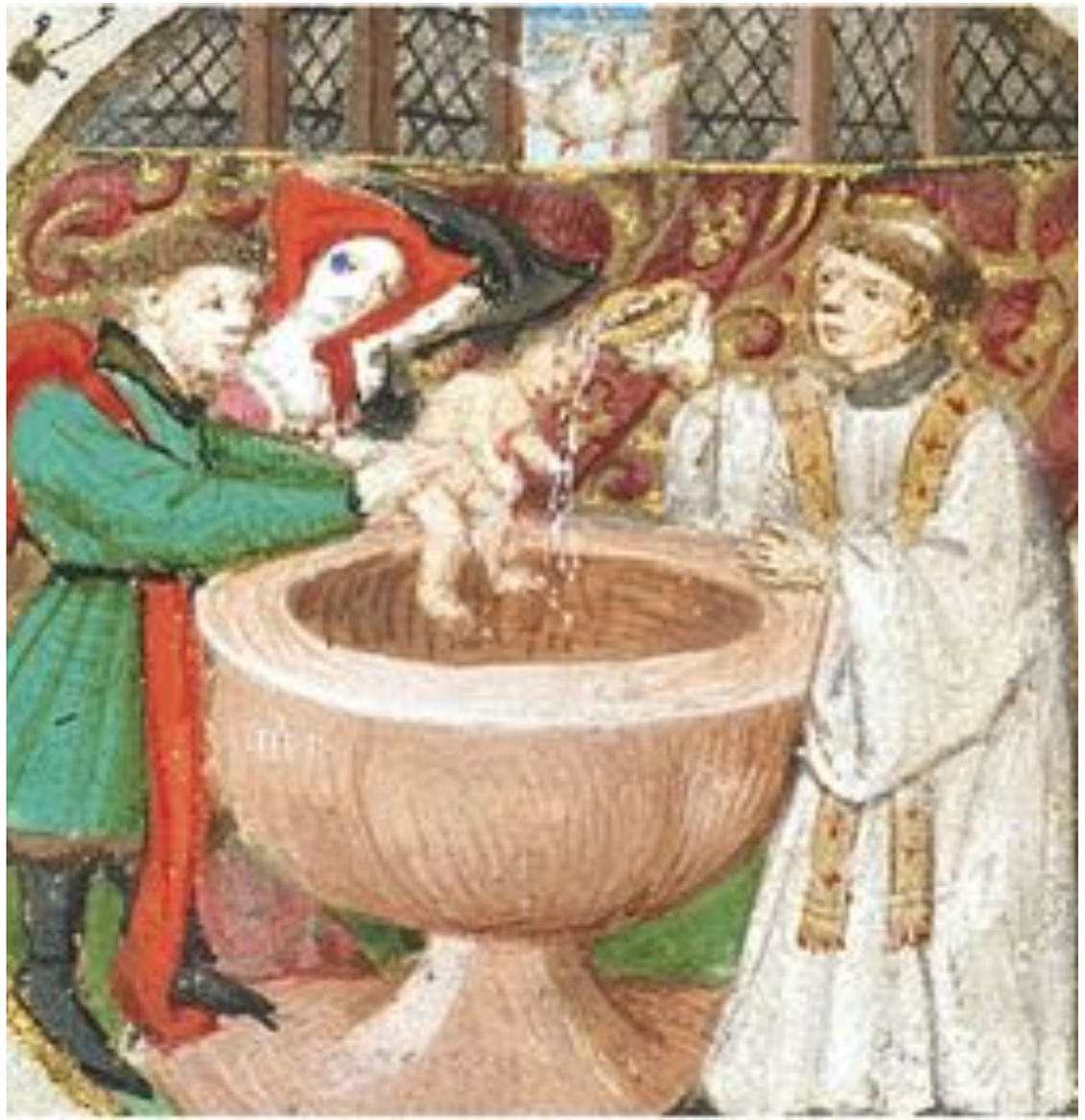
- The Waldensians were dispersed throughout Europe
  - They were disguised as merchants
  - They would sell, ‘without money or price’ something rarer than the gems and silks they carried
- They kept copies of the Scriptures (usually transcribed by them in the native language) on their person, and freely gave them to people when they saw a desire to possess it



They went forth two and two, concealing their real character under the guise of a secular profession, most commonly that of merchants or peddlers. They carried silks, jewelry, and other articles, at that time not easily purchasable save at distant mart, and they were welcomed as merchants where they would have been spurned as missionaries.

Waldensian Churches

- The Waldensians early on did not form a ‘separate church’
    - i.e., there was no ‘split’ with the Catholic Church
        - Their Children were baptized within the Catholic Church
        - They took communion (mass) once a year in the Catholic Church
- Within the church, however, these were a group of Bible-based Christians led by people



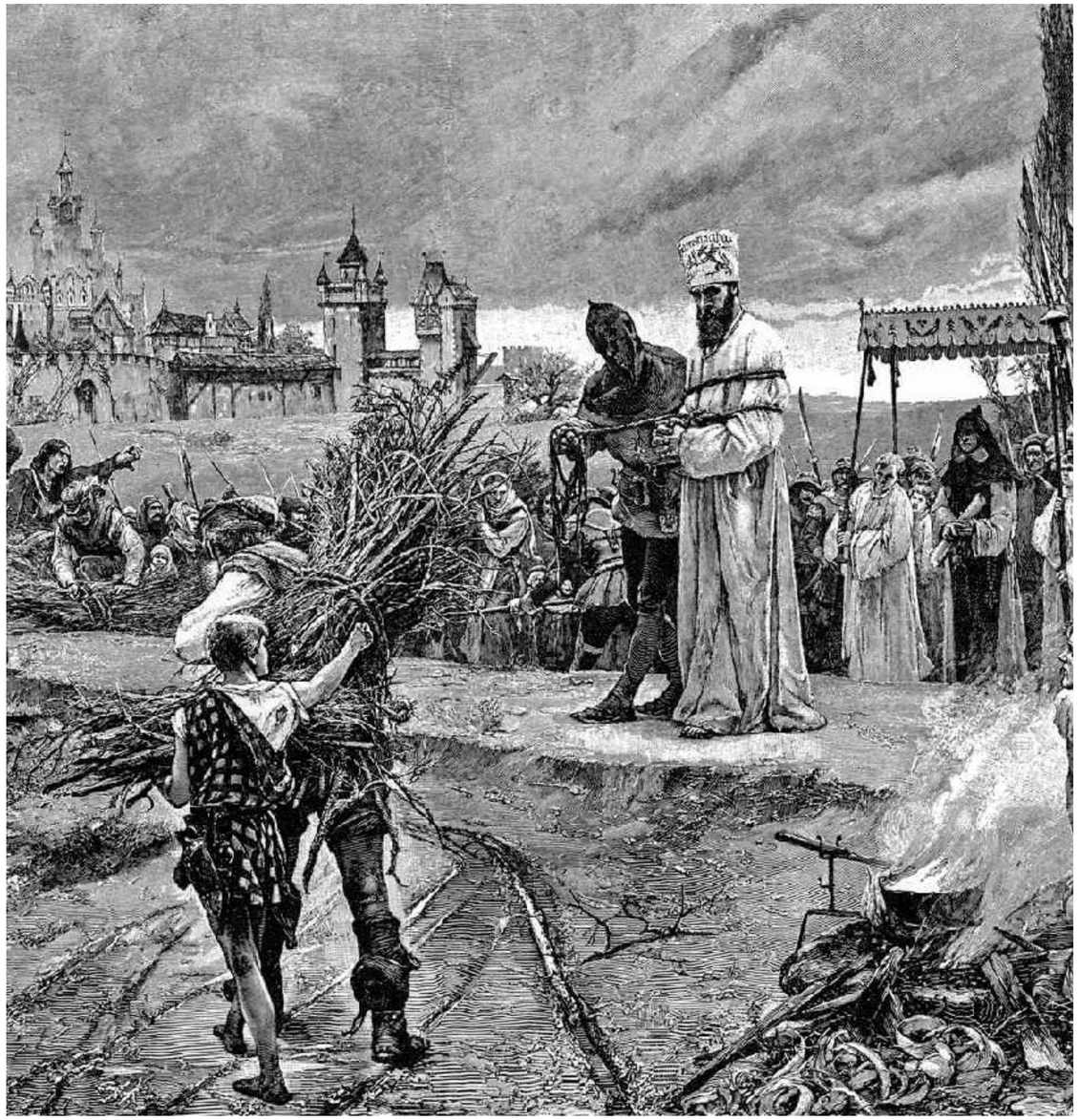
The Waldensian Methodology

- They called their leaders ‘Barbes,’ meaning ‘uncle’
- This is in contrast to ‘Father’ used by the Roman Catholic Church to denote their priests
- They met together, small groups of people, and were taught by these Barbes
    - They memorized the scriptures in their own language (not the vulgate)
    - They studied the Bible and were taught by ‘lay preachers’



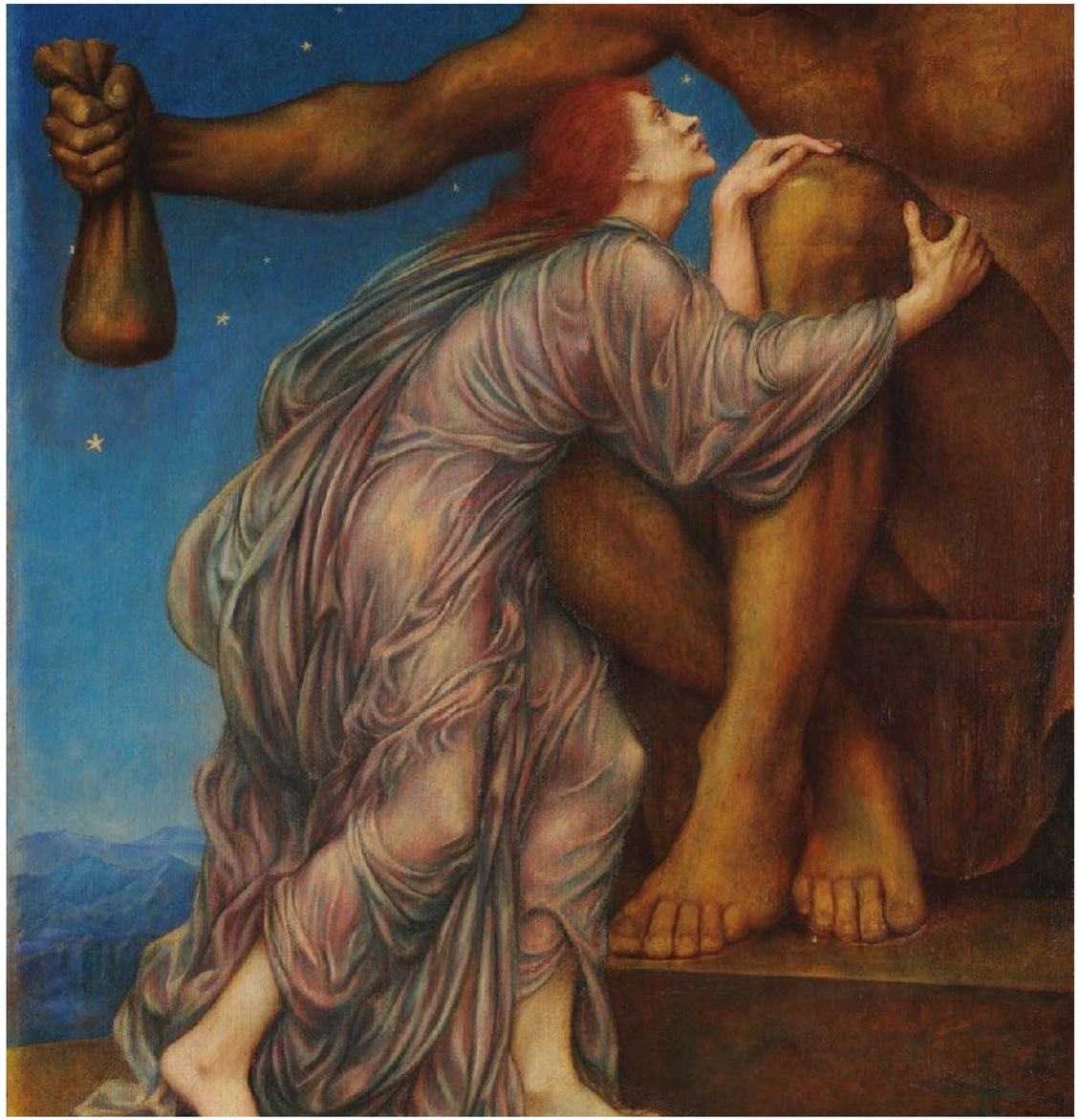
John Hus and the Waldensians

- The Waldensians missionary work into Europe had a great preparatory effect on the later Reformation
- In the Bohemian Brethren Confession (1558), John Hus' followers are called Waldensians
- By the time of the Reformation, the word Waldensian had become a general word for Christian Evangelicals



Waldensian Tenets: Poverty

- They gave away their money in order to follow Christ
    - This is a common occurrence during this period
    - Large numbers of laity and clergy were gripped by the idea of apostolic poverty
        - They wanted to live life as Jesus and the apostle’s lived.



"We have decided to live by the words of the Gosple, essentially that of the Sermon on the Mount and the commandments. That is to live in poverty without concern for tomorrow. But we hold that also those who continue to live their lives in the world doing good will be saved."

-Peter Waldo

“Naked, following the naked Christ.”

-Walter Map, Inquisitor Bishop

Waldensian Tenets: Interpretation

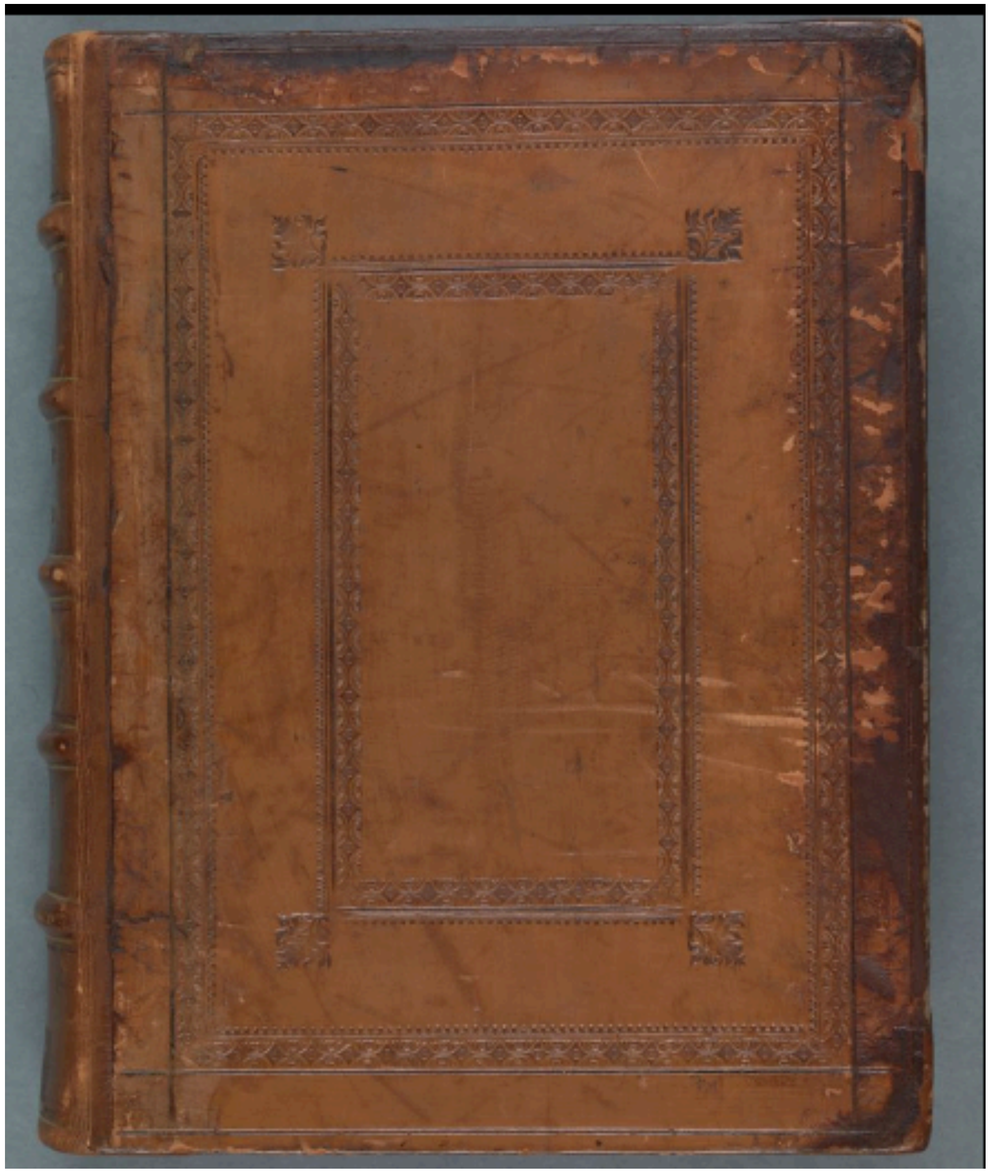
- They took a strict and literal interpretation of the Sermon on the Mount
    - They attempted to put that into practice in their everyday lives
- This meant **Poverty**
- A **repudiation of Violence**
    - Opposition to the Crusades
- They **would not take ‘oaths’**
    - A story of a man accused of being a Waldensian, his answer …



“Everybody here knows that I am not because I swear and lie and drink like any good catholic.”

Waldensian Tenets: The Bible

- They turned directly to the Bible
    - They read it in their own language (Peter Waldo financed the translation)
- They preached it for ‘salvation’ and ‘discipleship’
- They memorized the Bible
    - In their community, each family was responsible for memorizing different books of the Bible



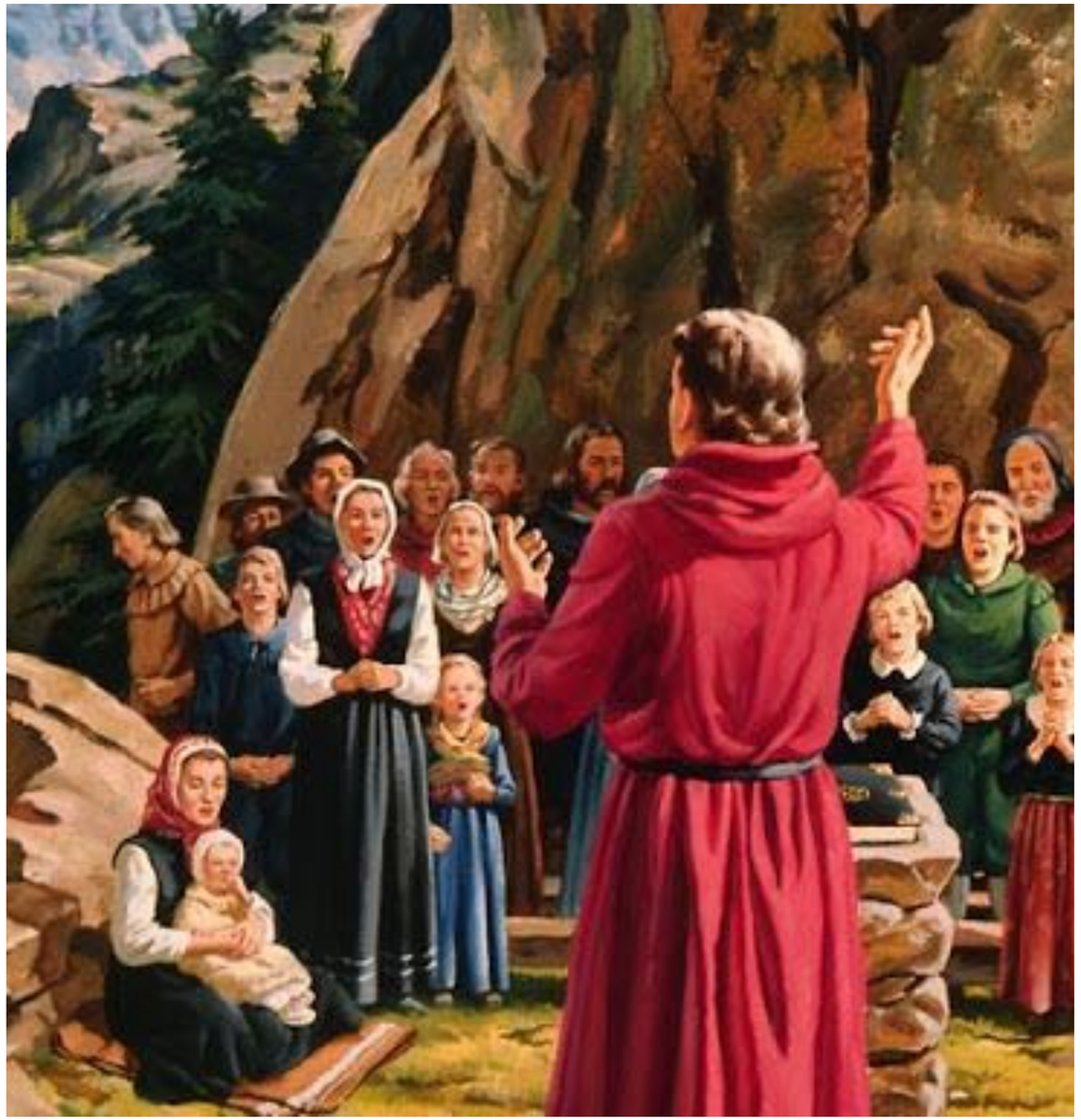
Waldensian Tenets: The Bible (cont.)

- As Persecution came to the Waldensians, Roman Catholic troops would come into the Valleys (the Vaudois, Valdese, etc.)
- The people were stripped of their Bibles and copies of the scriptures
- The families that escaped to the Cottian Alps would all return again
    - They would recite the whole Bible again to each other
    - As a community, they were able to have the entire Bible b/c they agreed together to memorize it



Waldensian Tenets: Lay Preaching

- They emphasized ‘lay preaching’ (the laity)
- They all ‘preached’
  - They believed that every Christian should both know the Bible and be able to preach it
- They preached wherever they went
  - Simple sermons that included the message of the Bible
- Their emphasis was on the ‘Bible alone’ (Sola Scriptura) in their preaching



Waldensian Tenets: Salvation

- They rejected the Roman Catholic Sacramental theology
    - ‘You are saved by means of grace through participation in the Sacraments’
        - Baptism, Eucharist, Confirmation, Marriage, ordination, extreme unction, etc.
- They only held Baptism and the Lord’s Supper
    - In line with Protestant beliefs
- The Waldensians believed the Bible Alone - not church and not tradition - is the source of our faith
- The 16th century Reformation stressed ‘justification by faith’ in a way the Waldensians did not
    - They still believed it, but did not emphasize it
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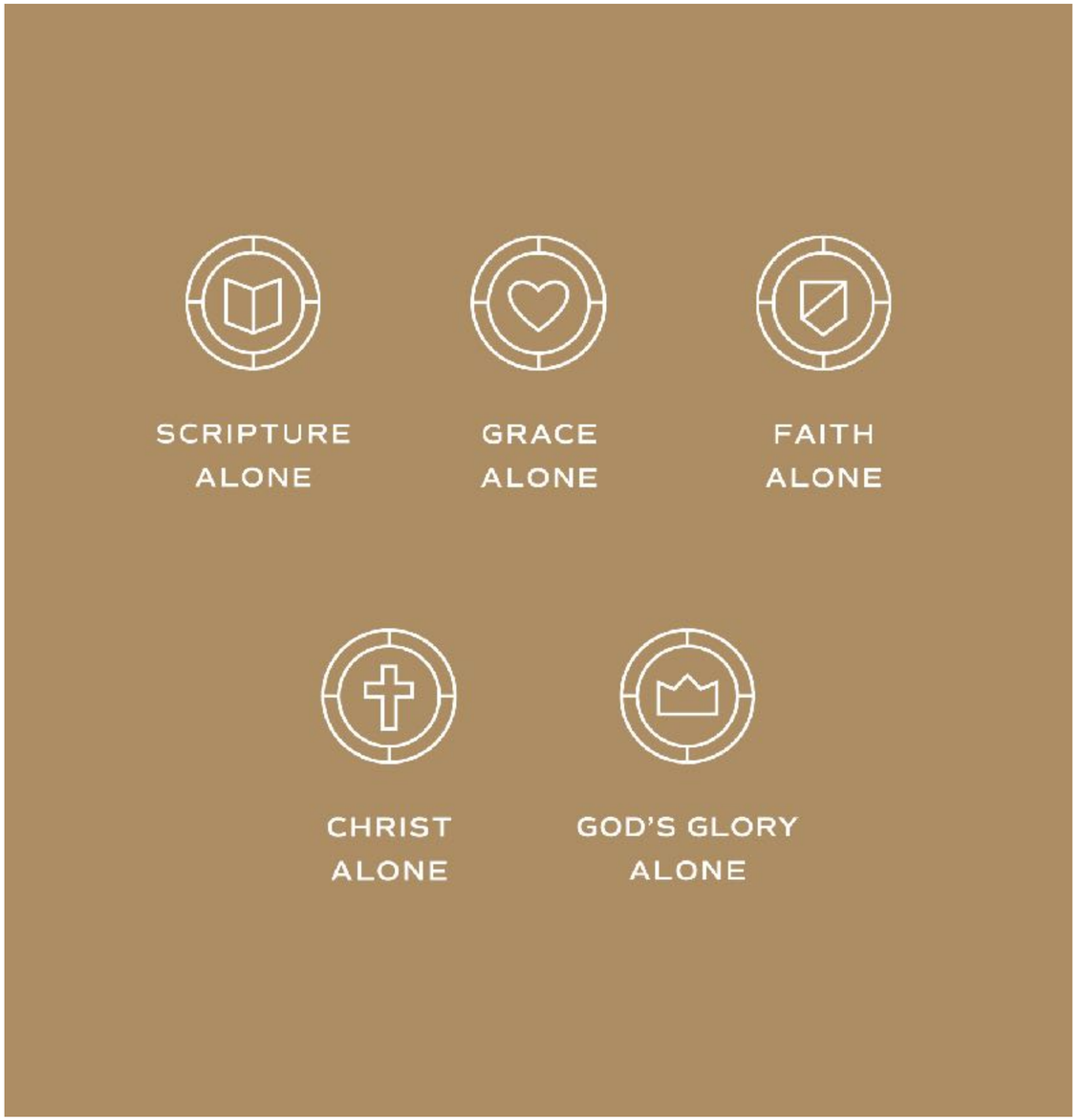


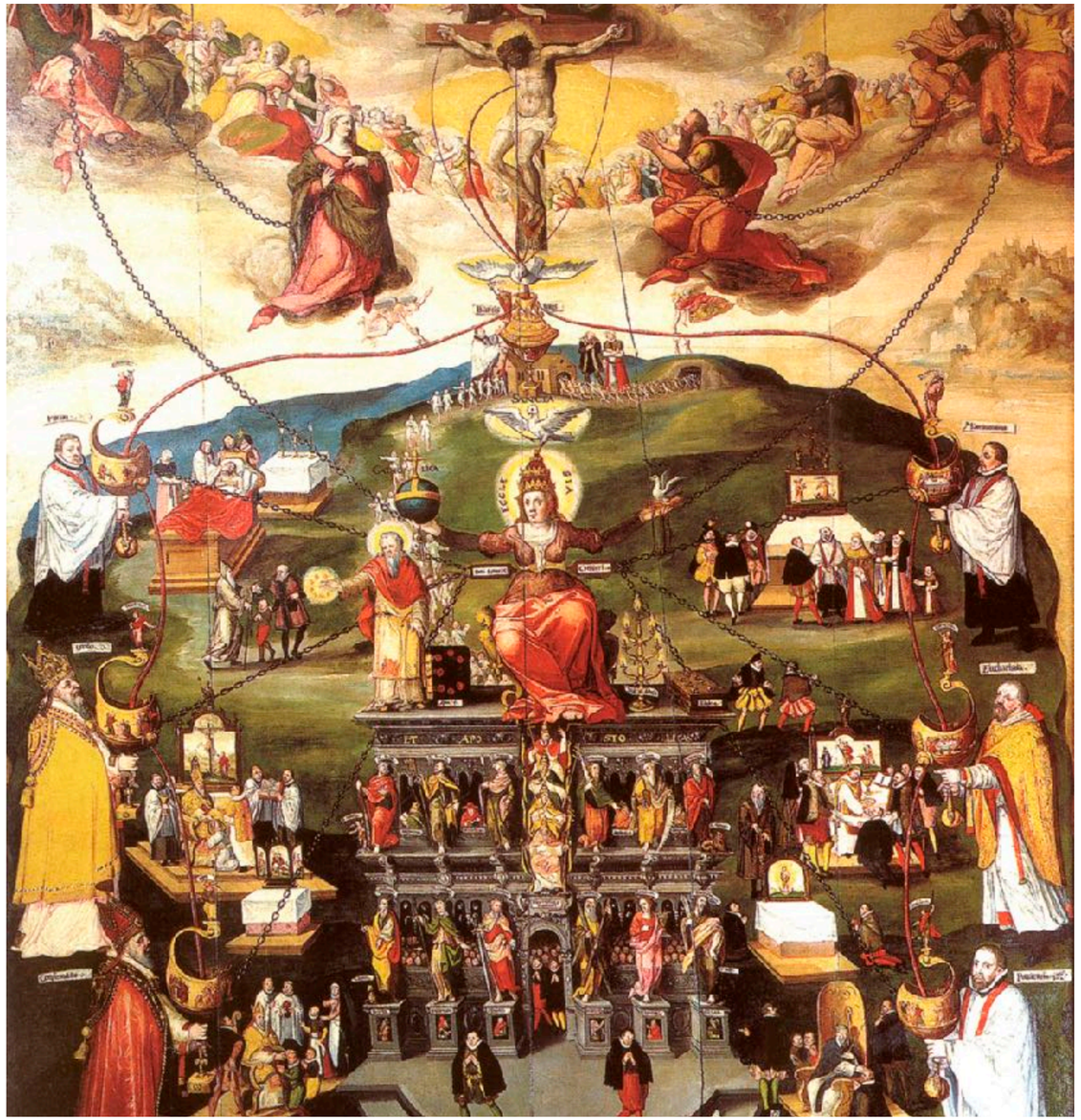
“It is God alone who pardons and no one else.”

-Waldensian Poem

Waldensian Tenets: Salvation

- Salvation comes through ‘God Alone’ and not through the sacraments of the church

- It will come through God’s pardoning Grace, received by Faith Alone (Sola Fide)



Waldensians and ‘the Church’

- They did not formally *break* with the Roman Catholic Church
- They were very different from the Roman Catholic Church in both standards and understanding
  - They rejected the political power, affluence, and control of the Pope and the Roman Catholic Church



Pope Innocent III

“Sylvester’s acceptance of worldly political power is a denial of the humility and poverty fundamental to obedient Christians who are followers of Christ and the Apostles. We must reject all forms of compromise of the church with the world.”

-Waldensian response to the donation of Constantine

Waldensian History

- This small group of believers eventually became a part of the *reformed* branch of the Reformation in 1532
  - From that time forward, they officially separated themselves from the Catholic Church
    - They built churches and began an independent life from the Roman Catholics
- They were persecuted during the religious wars following the Reformation



Waldensian Dispersion

- The persecution pushed them out of the Italian *Cottian Alps* to Geneva, but they returned in 1689
    - Waldensians were influenced by liberalism during the Enlightenment period (17th-18th centuries)
- There was an evangelical revival in Switzerland that revived the old Waldensian church (early 19th century)
- They moved out of the Valleys of the Italian Alps to S. America and to the US



Waldensian Dispersion (cont.)

- The Waldensians have a strong part of their church in Uruguay and Argentina
- They came to the US and (mostly) became presbyterians
  - Valdese, NC
  - Monett, MO

