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HISTORICAL PERSECUTIONS OF BELIEVERS – LESSON 8

THE WALDENSIANS

The new Roman Catholic Church, founded in the fourth century, continued persecuting Arian Christians through the fifth century. We will now look at persecutions of groups of believers as well as key individual believers over the following fourteen centuries. The Catholic Church persecuted anyone who did not conform to the authoritative rulership of the Catholic Church or any who criticized practices of the Church.

We will begin with the Waldensians in the twelfth century. The founder, John Waldo of Lyons, France, was moved by reading Jesus' words in Mark 10:21 saying to sell your goods, give it to the poor, and follow me. He did this and started preaching the gospel in public. People got saved and the movement grew rapidly. They became known as "The Poor" based on Matthew 5:3 which says, "**Blessed are the poor in spirit...**" as they voluntarily took Mark 10:21 literally. It began in the 1170's A.D.

They were evangelical and were fundamental in doctrine. Some have called them "the first reformation" four hundred years ahead of the Protestant Reformation led by Martin Luther. Although they still technically self-identified as Catholic, they went against much of the Catholic doctrine and church practices. By 1184 it had grown to the point where Pope Lucius III at the Synod of Verona excommunicated John Waldo and his followers. In 1211 the Catholic church burned over 80 of these declared heretics at the stake.

What prompted the established church of Rome to hate these Waldensians? What were they teaching? Here is a summary:

1. The total depravity (sin nature) of man
2. Denial of purgatory
3. No Bishops or Pope needed; Apostles had set elders, not Popes and bishops
4. No holy relics
5. They could eat meat every day (The Catholic church prohibited meat on Friday)
6. Pilgrimages were not necessary
7. No such thing as "holy water"
8. No transubstantiation (the literal blood and body of Christ in communion).
9. No church building was necessary in order to worship God.

They also believed the average believer should be able to read the Bible for himself which was forbidden by the Catholic church. Also, the Catholic Church only allowed scripture to be in Latin, the language of Rome. The Waldensians had several books of the Bible translated into the local French dialect for all to read.

This defiance of Catholic despotic control is what prompted the church to persecute these true believers of the gospel for many centuries to come. Yet, there are still some Waldensians in parts of France and Italy today. They have endured over 800 years of Roman Catholic persecution.

The beliefs they held are essentially the same beliefs held by most Protestants today. Their persistence is to be admired.