

Gabriel Audisio. *Preachers by Night: The Waldensian Barbes (15th–16th Centuries)*.

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They came by night and set off again by night, seeking to evade detection as they ministered clandestinely to small enclaves of Waldensians, the Poor of Christ, in private houses and other humble venues of France, Provence, Italy, and Germany. They preached, heard confession, gave absolution, and imposed penances. They practiced celibacy and radical poverty, living off the hospitality and donations of their fellow believers. These so-called *barbes* (a term of affection from the word *uncle*) are the subject of this important and commendable work by Gabriel Audisio on the origins, dispersion, and organization of the Waldensian preachers beginning with Vaudès and the Poor of Lyons in the late twelfth century and ending with the *barbes* of the early sixteenth century, who after negotiations with Guillaume Farel and others opted for the Reform.

Drawing on judicial proceedings and many other documents, Audisio gives us yet another impressive work on the history of the Waldensian movement, focusing here on the Waldensian preachers of Western Europe, since the records concerning their activities are far more abundant than those of Central Europe, giving for the first time “a global and quantitative picture of these preachers from the west” (94) who ministered to communities scattered in Provence, Dauphiné, Piedmont, Apulia, Calabria, the March of Ancona, and Spoleto. The author’s readings, interpretations, and analyses of these documents are careful, thoughtful, and convincing.

By the fifteenth and sixteenth century the *barbes* came from the peasantry, mostly illiterate shepherds and agricultural workers. Between the ages of twenty-five to thirty they committed themselves to this vocation and received some formal instruction in reading, teaching, and meditation; they also memorized a few books of the New Testament in the vernacular (*langue d’oc*), or, more exactly, in Romance, a form of Provençal, the common language of the western Waldensians. Going out two-by-two, initiates accompanied senior *barbes* and were remunerated with lodging, clothing, and a few coins, which they took commonly for distribution to the poor. When not on mission or attending the annual assembly of *barbes*,

they practiced a manual skill, such as care of the sick, so as not to burden financially the believers. Over the centuries, Waldensians demonstrated an unwavering loyalty to their *barbes* for the righteousness of their lives.

Services took place in safe houses around the fireplace, at night, with vigils posted. The sermons were evangelical, emphasizing repentance and the immanence of the final age. They urged believers to appreciate God's love for them, which was made clear by his selecting them for persecution. Many Waldensian doctrines sound strikingly similar to those of the Reformers: no purgatory, no intercession of Mary or the saints, no superstitions in praying at designated times of the day, no teaching unless found in scripture, no lying, no death penalty, and so on. Of significance, however, are their doctrinal differences with the Reformers. They placed great importance on auricular confession, the forgiveness of sins by the *barbes*, and acts of penance ("works"). An even greater difference, though a disciplinary one, was the Waldensians' "art of living their dissent in hiding" (14–15), which from the Reformers' perspective amounted to outright Nicodemism.

When confronted by Farel and others over their rejection of justification by faith alone and their practice of good works and belief in free will, the Waldensians came around to the Reformers' teachings. After the synod of Chanforan (1532), the majority of the *barbes* renounced the practices of celibacy, poverty, and obedience, rejected the sacrament and practice of auricular confession, and adopted the Zwinglian interpretation of the Eucharist. Other changes came about: oaths were permitted, while prayers at set times, fasting, the laying-on of hands, kneeling, and covering one's head, and the clandestine practice of religion, were discarded. The Pauline and canonical epistles were awarded recognition along with the Gospels, and a French Bible translated by Olivétan and printed in 1535 at the Waldensians' expense ended the tradition of using Romance for liturgical services. As Audisio notes, "absolutely everything in Olivétan's Bible [ran] counter to traditions formerly cherished by the Poor of Lyons" (222). With these changes "the barbes were no more" (223); the Waldensian sect had transformed itself into a Reformed church. By the 1560s and '70s, the Poor of Lyons had become "fully-fledged Protestants" (232).

This is a thoughtful, mature work of historical scholarship that should be welcomed by all scholars of Reformation Europe.

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