

CHAPTER 14

“Listen to this quote that goes along with our reading today,” began Mr. Dell as the class listened attentively. “We have an army of youth today who can do much if they are properly directed and encouraged. We want our children to believe the truth. We want them to be blessed of God. We want them to act a part in well-organized plans for helping other youth. Let all be so trained that they may rightly represent the truth, giving the reason of the hope that is within them, and honoring God in any branch of the work where they are qualified to labor.’ That’s found in the *General Conference Bulletin* January 29, 30, 1893.”

“Is that suppose to mean us?” questioned Hannah. “We’re just kids. I don’t think I’m ready to joining any ‘army of youth’.”

“Ah, but if you aren’t preparing now you will never be accepted into that army. Remember, the requirements for joining Christ’s army are to experience the New Birth, be filled with the Holy Spirit and have Christ’s character. It’s like that poster on our bulletin board says, ‘True character is not shaped from without, and put on; it radiates from within’ (DA 307). That means there has to be a preparation in our heart that takes place before we are ready to work for God.”

“Yeah, that makes sense.”

“Today we are going to find out how the Waldenses trained their children to be recruits in Christ’s army.

PROTESTANT’S SECRET WEAPON

A finish carpenter once told me the following story: He had been hired to work on a house that was constructed on a former swampland. The general contractor, thinking to save time and money, neglected to sink the footings deep enough to hit solid rock. Before the carpenters completed the house, large cracks could be seen trailing across the sheet rock and whenever a heavy truck rumbled by the house the whole floor would undulate like an earthquake was taking place. How sad that the family who planned to move in never had the opportunity to enjoy the house. Its deficient foundation made that building unsafe to live in.

Just as every house needs a solid foundation, so a church needs true Christian education to maintain strong and healthy growth. Early defenders of truth such as Patrick, Columba and Aiden understood that important principle and founded numerous training schools for their youth. Many years later, men like Melanchthon and Martin Luther showed the same understanding. They knew that for the Reformation to maintain its growth and strength students must be trained in the ways of God. One of Melanchthon’s most important contributions to the Reformation was to organize the first Protestant schools where biblical truth was taught.

The Waldenses also understood the value of Christian education. Their youth were the church of the future and the Waldenses needed a strong group of young people to carry on the work of God. As Waldensian parents held their tiny baby, they did not wish wealth, comfort, or pleasure for their child. They recognized that the most enduring legacy they could give their precious infant would be to lead them into a saving relationship with God and help them to develop a Christlike character.

In *The Great Controversy* p. 67 we are told how parents trained their children to remain faithful to God. “Parents, tender and affectionate as they were, loved their children too wisely to accustom them to self-indulgence. Before them was a life of trial and hardship, perhaps a martyr’s death. They were educated from childhood to endure hardness, to submit to control, and yet to think and act for themselves. Very early they were taught to bear responsibilities, to

be guarded in speech, and to understand the wisdom of silence. One indiscreet word let fall in the hearing of their enemies, might imperil not only the life of the speaker, but the lives of hundred of his brethren; for as wolves hunting their prey did the enemies of truth pursue those who dared to claim freedom of religious faith.”

Wise Waldensian parents knew that useful labor was important to the development of their child's character. Through self-denial, self-discipline and self-motivation they developed into strong and dependable youth. They helped to carefully cultivate each strip of usable land, then planted the fruits, grains and vegetables that provided food not only for themselves but also their herds and flocks. Young people learned to make clothing, tools, houses and weapons. Through their daily work they developed habits of carefulness, responsibility, industry, self-control, perseverance and obedience.

Waldensian students used the Bible as their primary textbook. Before the days of printing presses all Bibles were reproduced by hand. Many hours were spent in the exacting process of copying Scripture to share with those seeking for a knowledge of God. With few copies of Scripture, even small portions of the Bible were treasured. The youth were required to memorize whole books of Scripture and many could quote the entire New Testament along with many passages from the Old Testament. This was a great blessing to the individual – “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee” (Psalms 119:11) – but it also had a very practical application. Because of the continuous and brutal persecutions of the Waldensian people, their precious copies of Scripture were at times destroyed. If that happened, they were able to reproduce the entire manuscript from memory.

As they grew to manhood, many of the young Waldensian men said farewell to their valley homes and traveled to the large seminaries in Lombardy or to the famous Sorbonne in Paris. These young people knew that they would be exposed to numerous temptations and recognized that they must not form close friendships with their fellow students. They saw themselves as missionaries and ambassadors for their King.

Since university campuses did not offer accommodations in those days, the Waldensian students rented room in homes located near their school. The Christian young people were such examples of kindness, honesty, industry and piety that many landlords were favorably influenced for truth.

With prayer, and guidance from the Holy Spirit, the Waldenses youth found creative ways to witness to those they met. They knew they could not openly share their faith for fear of persecution from the Roman Church officials, but that did not silence them. Imitating Christ's example in the temple at twelve years old, they learned to ask questions which challenged their fellow students and even their instructors to examine more deeply the “pearls” found in Scripture. When someone expressed an interest, the youth would share portions of the Bible with them and explain the deeper truths found in God's Word.

The Waldensians had only one purpose for their education; everything they learned became an avenue through which to share their faith. They became fluent in many languages so they could teach and preach in the native tongue of their listeners. They also developed the skills needed to translate the Scriptures into the common language of the people.

Some students enrolled in the music program at the university. They became trained troubadours traveling from place to place singing as entertainment for both wealthy and poor. But it must be noted that the Waldensians' purpose was not to amuse their listeners with silly ditties, but rather to make them ponder spiritual things. Most of their music was prepared so that as they sang they delivered a touching sermon to their audience.

Other missionaries traveled from place to place posing as merchants selling costly silks, delicate jewelry and other rare goods. When they were welcomed into a wealthy home or palace, they would discreetly look for an opportunity to present truth to those who seemed interested in spiritual things. They knew that carefully sewn into their clothing were portions of painstakingly copied Scripture to share with those searching for truth. In that way God's Word was placed into the hands of wealthy citizens and sometimes even the homes of the nobility. Perhaps we can say that Waldensian youth were the first colporteurs to go house-to-house with written treasures.

Here Mr. Dell paused. "I have some illustrations that you might find interesting. This is a depiction of merchants bringing not only precious goods, but also sharing the Words of Life with those seeking to know God better. Let me read to you a quote from *The Great Controversy* p. 73, 74. 'Eagerly did the Vaudois missionary unfold to the inquiring mind the precious truths of the gospel. Cautiously he produced the carefully written portions of the Holy Scriptures. It was his greatest joy to give hope to the conscientious, sin-stricken soul, who could see only a God of vengeance, waiting to execute justice. With quivering lip and tearful eye did he, often on bended knees, open to his brethren the precious promises that reveal the sinner's only hope. Thus the light of truth penetrated many a darkened mind, rolling back the cloud of gloom, until the Sun of Righteousness shone into the heart with healing in His beams. It was often the case that some portion of Scripture was read again and again, the hearer desiring it to be repeated, as if he would assure himself that he had heard aright. Especially was the repetition of these words eagerly desired: "The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin." 1 John 1:7. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of man be lifted up: that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have eternal life." John 3:14, 15.

"Many were undeceived in regard to the claims of Rome. They saw how vain is the mediation of men or angels in behalf of the sinner. As the true light dawned upon their minds they exclaimed with rejoicing: "Christ is my priest; His blood is my sacrifice; His altar is my confessional".'



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"As was mentioned in our book, troubadours played an important role in spreading the gospel. Putting Biblical themes to song, Christian musicians brought truth to the common people under the guise of entertaining them. Some say that music is the universal language, and as the troubadour sang,

the Holy Spirit softened hearts to accept the story of heaven.



<http://www.google.ca/imgres?imgres=http://www.medieval-life-and-times.info/images/medieval-woodwind-musicians.jpg>

“But let's continue with our book...

A young Waldensian who aspired to be a “barb” spent three years as a missionary evangelist before settling down to serve as the pastor. Each missionary labored with an experienced minister who oversaw this phase of his education. Being so far from home and loved ones, it no doubt encouraged the youth to have a wise and mature minister to counsel and pray with. During these important years of training the young men learned tact, wisdom, faith and reliance on God – all traits that made them godly leaders for their people.

Eternity will reveal that many of the seeds of truth that grew and blossomed during the Reformation were sown by the simple, pious people of the valleys. As Waldensian missionaries presented portions of scripture to eager hearers they also spoke about the corruptions in the Roman Church. Many superstitious worshipers gladly realized they did not have to complete long, expensive pilgrimages to holy shrines in order to have their sins forgiven. It was with rejoicing they accepted Jesus’ invitation, “Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls” (Matthew 11:29). Many were set free from fear and guilt and from trying to appease an angry and vengeful God. They learned to love the Father who gave His Son as a substitute for sinful man. Only eternity will reveal the bountiful harvest that resulted from such faithful Waldensian missionaries.

“Wow, they really were able to accomplish a lot! But what if we don’t have the kinds of talents they had?” Carrie wondered out loud. “I’m afraid to talk with strangers and I couldn't sing if my life depended on it.”

“Some people have preached a whole sermon and haven’t said a word,” Mr. Dell replied.

“How?” Carrie sounded skeptical.

“I remember hearing how clever Lutheran artists used their exceptional talents to show the

difference between Jesus and the one who claims to be the representative of Christ. For instance one artist drew a picture of Jesus in His simple robe riding on a humble donkey. Then he contrasted that with a pompous papal procession with the pope robed in costly garments adorned with jewels.”

“I bet that left an impact on the spectators,” Aaron grinned.

“Wait a minute while I find some pictures to show you,” Mr. Dell clicked his way into a picture folder. “...Ah, here's what I was looking for. In the picture on the left we see Christ kneeling down and washing His disciples’ feet. Certainly the people would recognized the contrast between Christ's actions and the way the pope expected obeisance from his subjects. Pictures like this forced the people to ask themselves how the haughty pontiff could portray himself as the successor to the meek and lowly Jesus. Each picture was a sermon without words.”



<http://score.rims.k12.ca.us/activity/worth/>

The students leaned forward to catch the details in the new woodcuts Mr. Dell projected on the screen.

“The next two pictures were done by an artist named Lucas Cranach. Philip Melanchthon, the great theologian of the Reformation, wrote the text to go along with Cranach's pictures. They were compiled into a small book published at Wittenberg in 1521 called *Passional Christi und Antichristi*. In the first picture we see Jesus – whip in hand - ridding the temple of the greedy money changers while in the next picture we see the pope sitting in God's temple collecting coins from the sale of indulgences and other 'blessings'.



http://www.wga.hu/art/c/cranach/lucas_e/9/passion.jpg

“And finally, take a look at this picture, class. Sometimes the artist's works were meant to lead the viewers mind to a specific text in the Bible.



<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/0/0c/Hure.Babylon.mod.jpg>

“Doesn't this woodcut remind you of Revelation 17:3-6 where it talks about a woman sitting upon a seven-headed beast? Viewing a picture like that would open up many opportunities to explore the Biblical understanding of spiritual Babylon, the scarlet colored beast and the entity that was drunk with the blood of the saints.”

“I guess there *are* all sorts of ways to witness for Jesus,” said Jeremy. “We may not all be able to preach a sermon, but there is certainly some way for us to work for Him.”

“The very best witness is a kind, helpful, honest life,” agreed Mr. Dell. “When we are connected to God He will show us how to be workers for Him.”

B.G. Wilkinson, *Truth Triumphant: The Church in the Wilderness* (Teach Services, Brushton, New York, 1994) Chapters 15, 16

Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy* (Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, ID, 1971) Chapter 4

J.A. Wylie, *History of the Waldenses* (Pacific Press Publishing Assoc., Mountain View, California, 1977) Chapter 2