

Peter Waldo

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Statue of Peter Waldo at the Luther Memorial at [Worms, Germany](#)

Born 1140

Died 1218

Peter Waldo, Valdo, or Waldes (c. 1140 – c. 1218), also **Pierre Vaudès** or **de Vaux**, is believed by many to have started the [Waldensians](#). This was a [Christian](#) spiritual movement of the [Middle Ages](#). People are still alive in southern [Europe](#) who come from this movement. Because not much was written down about Waldo while he was alive, people do not agree how important he was to the Waldensians, because it may have been around before his leadership. Also, the French historian [Thuanus](#) thought Waldo died in the year 1179.^[1]

Life and work

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Not many details are known about the life of Waldo. Some sources say that he was a rich man who sold [clothes](#), and that he was a [merchant](#) from [Lyon](#). Also, sources say that he had some [education](#). Sometime not long before the year 1160 he was inspired by some events. One of these was hearing a sermon on the life of [St. Alexius](#). Another was when saying that one did not believe in [transubstantiation](#) (which is the belief that, during [Communion](#), the [bread](#) and [wine](#) turn into the body and [blood](#) of [Jesus Christ](#)) became a [crime](#) for which one could be [punished by death](#). A third event was the sudden death of a friend during an evening meal.^{[2][3][4]} After this, he began living a radical Christian life. He gave his [property](#) to his wife. He gave the rest of his things to the poor.

At about this time, Waldo began to preach and teach publicly about his ideas of living simple lives and about [poverty](#). He taught that "No man can serve two masters, God and [money](#)", (see [Gospel of Matthew](#) 6:24) and strongly [criticized](#) things done by the [Pope](#) and things taught by the [Roman Catholic Church](#). Some of the things taught by the Catholic Church that he criticized were [purgatory](#) and transubstantiation. He said that the Roman Catholic Church was the [prostitute](#) from the [book of Revelation](#).^[5] By 1170, many people were following him. These people were called *the Poor of Lyon*, *the Poor of [Lombardy](#)*, or *the Poor of God* who would spread their teaching abroad while dressed up as [peddlers](#).^[6] Often called the [Waldensians](#) (or Waldenses), they were different from the Albigensians or Cathari.

The Waldensian movement had lay preaching (people who were not preachers or priests for a living preached), people who were poor by choice, and strictly obeying the [Bible](#). Between 1175-1185, Waldo either had a [cleric](#)

from Lyons translate the [New Testament](#) of the Bible into the [language](#) that most people spoke, the [Arpitan \(Franco-Provençal\) language](#), or translate it himself.^[7]

In 1179, Waldo and one of his followers went to [Rome](#), where they were welcomed by [Pope Alexander III](#), and the [Roman Curia](#). They had to explain what they believed in front of a panel of three clergymen, including issues which were then debated within the Church. These included the idea that all people were [priests](#), teaching the [gospel](#) in the language most people spoke, and people living poor, simple lives on purpose. The results of the meeting were [inconclusive](#), and Waldo's ideas, but not the movement itself, were [condemned](#) at the [Third Lateran Council](#) in the same year, although the leaders of the movement had not been yet [excommunicated](#) (kicked out of the Church).

Sent away from [Lyon](#), Waldo and his followers moved to the high valleys of [Piedmont](#), and in France, in the [Luberon](#). Finally, Waldo was excommunicated by [Pope Lucius III](#) during the synod held at [Verona](#) in 1184, and the doctrine of the Poor of Lyon was again [condemned](#) by the [Fourth Lateran Council](#) in 1215 where they are mentioned by name for the first time, and called [heresy](#). The [Roman Catholic Church](#) began to [persecute](#) the Waldensians, and many were tried and sentenced to death in different European countries during the 12th, 13th, and 14th centuries. The Waldensians survived by moving the Alps and hiding there. Centuries after his death, the Waldensian denomination joined the Genevan or [Reformed](#) branch of the [Protestant Reformation](#).

More reading

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- Audisio, Gabriel, *The Waldensian Dissent: Persecution and Survival, c. 1170 - c.1570*, Cambridge Medieval Textbooks. (1999) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, [ISBN 0521559847](#)

References

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1. [↑](#) William Jones, *History of the Waldenses*, (London: 1816) volume 2, pg 12
2. [↑](#) Jean Paul Perrin, *History of the Old Waldenses Anterior to the Reformation*, (New York: 1884) pg 21
3. [↑](#) Jones, vol 2, pg 8
4. [↑](#) M. Aston, *Faith and Fire: Popular and Unpopular Religion, 1350-1600*, (London, 1993) p.18.
5. [↑](#) Perrin, pg 22
6. [↑](#) JA Wylie, *History of the Waldenses*, (London: 1848), pg 17
7. [↑](#) Jones, vol 2, pg 10

Other websites

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- [Link to the *Medieval sourcebook* text about Peter Waldo Archived 2010-12-03 at the \[Wayback Machine\]\(#\)](#)

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