

Scholar asks: Did the Waldensians keep the Sabbath?

This article is a review of Darrell W. Conder's article, "The Waldensians and the Seventh-day Sabbath," published by Commonwealth Publishing, P.O. Box 11476, Salt Lake City, Utah 84147. Write for details on prices for copies of the copyrighted article (which will cover copying and mailing costs). Commonwealth Publishing also offers a catalog of Sabbatarian and hard-to-find materials.

By Mac Overton

Were the Waldensians, the 12th-century followers of Peter Waldo, Sabbath-keepers? This question is important, Darrell W. Conder believes, because the current leader of the Worldwide Church of God, Joseph Tkach Jr., "grasped at a straw" in an interview on the *Bible Answer Man* radio program to use "faulty history" by Herbert Armstrong and other WCG writers to disavow the seventh-day Sabbath.

This brief (six pages typeset) article coherently summarizes available evidence about who and what the Waldensians were.

Mr. Conder, a former member of the Worldwide Church of God, was a personal assistant to Joseph Tkach Sr. in the ministerial-services department in the late 1970s at WCG headquarters. Mr. Conder is cofounder of Commonwealth Publishing & Books of Salt Lake City and is the author of *Mystery Babylon the Great: The Mother of Harlots and Abominations of the Earth*. He is a professional genealogist.

Mr. Conder, himself born into a Sabbatarian and Holy Day-keeping family, makes a case for the term

Waldensian being a catch-all word applied to a broad range of accused heretics at odds with the Roman Catholic Church in the Middle Ages.

He shows, from historical records, that the "Waldenses" precede their supposed namesake, Peter Waldo, by perhaps 500 years.

"Interestingly, history reveals that the people in question rarely called themselves Waldensians," Mr. Conder writes. "The reason for this was clear: They were not all Waldensians! Here are some names, or labels, applied by historians to the 'heretics' of Catholicism: Pasaginians, Albigenes, Waldenses, Josephists, Cathari, Arnoldists, Henricians, Paulicians, Bogomils, Insabbatati, Berengarians, Subalpini, Patarines, Petrobrusians and Vallenses."

Mr. Conder says the word *Waldensian* is disputable. "Most authorities agree, however, that it originated from the Italian word *Valdesi*, or French *Vaudois* (Latin *Vallis*), which meant 'valleys' and denoted the regions in which the Waldensians and many of the aforementioned people lived."

Catholics linked Waldo to Waldenses

The one clear fact in Waldensian history is that a leader named Peter Waldo emerged, and his name—coincidentally similar to theirs—became synonymous with these people.

"In fact, the Catholic Church, in order to ignore their ancient history, put forward that the Waldensians—religion, name and all—originated with Peter Waldo: a claim that all reputable historians ignore."

Who was Peter Waldo? He was a

rich merchant of Lyons, France. In 1170 he underwent a religious experience and founded a religious movement, or order, known as the Poor Men of Lyons.

"The reason that Waldo and his 'Poor Men' (or ministers) came to overshadow the groups just mentioned is because they received recognition from the Catholic Church," writes Mr. Conder. "It was this notoriety that not only cemented Waldo to the Waldensian history as a whole, but has caused him to become synonymous with the name."

Mr. Conder points out that, based on known history, "there is no evidence that Peter Waldo ever accepted or worshiped on the seventh-day Sabbath."

During most of his ministry, Waldo was considered within the framework of the Catholic Church. This led to his movement being tolerated by the church at Rome.

"In fact," Mr. Conder states, "the Poor Men of Lyons were so well known within Catholicism that Pope Alexander III approved their doctrine of poverty and gave his consent, with restrictions, to their preaching. It was only later when Waldo went against some of these restrictions and began to denounce certain Catholic customs that he was excommunicated."

The question of whether the Waldensians followed the seventh-day Sabbath is settled, Mr. Conder says, by the knowledge that, when the Catholic inquisitor Sacconi (or Sacco) levied charges against the Waldensians, the Sabbath is conspicuous by its absence.

"Despite this," Mr. Conder main-

tains, "the fact remains that there were during this time seventh-day Sabbath-keepers in many parts of Europe. What's more, they were to be partly found in the aforementioned groups. It is even possible that some of these groups, as a whole and at specific times, may have been true Sabbatarians."

Similarities to Millerites

Mr. Conder likens Waldo to William Miller, the Protestant minister who founded the Millerite (or Advent) movement of the early 19th century from which derived Seventh-day Adventists and the Church of God (Seventh-day) and, thereby, the Radio (later Worldwide) Church of God and its many offshoots today.

While Mr. Miller never accepted the seventh-day Sabbath and remained a Sunday-keeper throughout his life, his movement spawned the leading Sabbatarian movements of our day.

"This situation can be somewhat applied to Peter Waldo," states Mr. Conder. "Waldo's 12th-century effort led to a brief period in history when Sabbath-keeping came into the daylight. For the first time in centuries, those who kept the true Sabbath could practice their religion in the open. We learn, thanks to the efforts of Peter Waldo and the Poor Men of Lyons, that true Sabbatarians were still in existence and had long been underground: They had been hiding in fear of their lives so that they could obey the eternal command of God!"

"We should not however (as does the Catholic Church) dismiss the Pasaginians, Albigenes, Josenhists,

Arnoldists, Henricians, Paulicians, Bogomils, Insabbatati, Berengarians, Subalpini, Cathari, Patarines, Petrobrusians, and Vallenses, who predated Waldo by centuries. It was the history and Sabbath-keeping traditions of some of these Christians that were absorbed by Waldo and the later Waldensians."

Mr. Conder summarizes his article by noting that, while Waldensians were, in the main, not Sabbath-keepers, as taught erroneously by the Worldwide Church of God for many years, some observers of the Sabbath lived among those identified by this label through the centuries.

Justifying eras and apostolic series

He speculates that some WCG historians in the past erroneously taught that Peter Waldo and his followers were Sabbatarians to justify a belief in church eras.

"Even if you accept church eras as Scriptural, the true history of the Christian Sabbath and the people who kept it cannot be 'squeezed' into such a framework," Mr. Conder writes. "Nor can the doctrine of an 'apostolic' succession."

God, he says, "has never in history had to rely on such an outline. When He has needed a special person to fulfill such a mission, He has simply raised up that individual and ordained him/her for the purpose. More to the point, it is demonstrable from history that Sabbath-keeping churches often did not overlap each other either in time or geography. This means that there was usually no ordination from a successor and that the only requirement to preach was an understanding of the laws of God."