

# Did Peter Waldo Keep God's Sabbath?

Just a short introductory comment to this interesting paper by Mr. Lawson Briggs.

Some have felt it essential to claim the names of persons or groups in their church histories and to impute the exact doctrinal details of their own modern understanding to them, in order to fully "legitimize" themselves to themselves.

All this is an exercise in *futility!* The church today is authenticated by its own faith, doctrine and practice, not by who it claims descent from. Furthermore, *most* of what is available historically about our spiritual ancestors was written by ENEMIES of such people and therefore is sketchy, questionable, etc.

Some have placed great weight on whether or not Peter Waldo kept the Sabbath. The whole point is a total *ASIDE* to the Sabbath question — though perhaps historically "interesting" — and irrelevant one way or the other, either as to whether or not Waldo and his people were called and accepted by God, and therefore *in* God's Church, or as to whether we today should keep the Sabbath.

by Lawson C. Briggs

A GREAT deal of confusion has existed in times past — especially among Sabbath keeping people — about our Christian predecessors, their doctrine and practice. Our knowledge of Waldo and the Waldenses is a prime example.

Peter Valdés (Waldo in English) first appeared in the public eye in southern France during the last half of the 12th century. Only sketches relating certain incidents of his life are known.

This much, however, we do know. The name "Waldenses" was coined and branded upon all those who from that time onward came forth *out of* paganized "Christianity."

## Waldo and the Waldenses

Valdés was a leader in seeking a return to a purer form of "Apostolic" Christianity. But the work he started and led was divided very early into several separate groups. It was divided not

only by geography (because transportation and communication was slow,) but also by doctrinal points.

For instance, the Italian group, who in later times chiefly become known as "the Waldenses" whose descendants still exist today as a Protestant church, finally ejected Valdés from the position of leadership. His later work was in Germany and Bohemia.

In part, this doctrinal diversity stemmed from earlier groupings. There had been Petrobrusians, Henricians, Arnoldists, Speronists, etc. — to name just a few of the most significant parties. According to modern scholars and historians, and according to the popes and inquisitors of those times, the survivors of those earlier parties made common cause with Valdés and his earliest followers, the Poor Men of Lyons. Yet traces of their disparate origin did not disappear. Instead they became very

evident only slightly later among the Waldenses.

The sparse and sketchy accounts of Waldensian teachings and history do not always make it clear which group, or whether all, believed in a certain tenet or alleged "heresy." Apparently all of them, in marked and total contrast to the Catholic practice of taking the mass, kept, instead, the Passover — *annually*. They believed that God's law must be kept. They knew and practiced adult baptism following real repentance. The name of "Rebaptizers" appeared, therefore, *not* centuries later with the post-Reformation Ana-baptists, but with the earlier Waldenses.

Did they also keep God's Sabbath on the biblical seventh day of the week? Seventh Day Baptists, Seventh Day Adventists and others — especially in earlier decades — have affirmed that they did.

But what is the evidence?

It is sketchy! In the same place, geographically, and at the same time that the earliest Waldenses existed in Northwestern Italy (where Valdés moved from Lyons), there were people called Passagi or Passagini. These did keep the true Sabbath. They also kept *all* of God's annual Holy Days.

Were the Passagi a part of the Waldenses? It cannot be definitely proven that they were. On the other hand, neither has it ever been proven that they were not.

What other "evidence" has been brought forward?

#### **Zapatati and Inzabbati**

The earliest mentions of Waldenses — all, incidentally, written by enemies — agree that these "heretics" unanimously profaned and taught against the Catholic Church's festivals and special days. Yet they were most zealous in personal observance of the requirements of true Christianity. So some have assumed that they necessarily negated the Catholic Sunday while exalting and marking the Sabbath. Perhaps that is true. But actual *proof* is not easy to find.

It has often been assumed that Waldenses were Sabbath keepers because some of them were called Sabatati or Zapatati. (Another group were called the Inzabbati.) As early as 1194 Alphonse, king of Aragon, Barcelona and Provence, decreed severe penalties against these "Waldenses, Zapatati or Inzabbati" if they were found in his territory.

But these names should not be construed to indicate those people kept the Sabbath. If any

such meaning had been involved, it should be clear that IN-Zabbati would have meant "NOT Sabbath-keepers." But in actual fact, the terms had reference to the kind of sandal or shoe (French *sabot*, Spanish *zapato*, late Latin *sabbatum*) which they wore.

Some of the Waldenses wore shoes (sabots), but other groups went about with bare or exposed feet to exemplify the "apostolic poverty" which was widely regarded in that day as the true example of Jesus Himself. As a matter of fact, it was simply the normal, logical thing in that day to go about the hot, dusty roads of Judaea and Galilee in sandals or barefoot.

Later, when some of the Waldenses made peace with the pope and were accepted by him as officially organized groups within the Catholic Church in the years 1208 and 1210, they perpetuated the shoeless tradition. "We have elected to wear the modest religious garb to which we are accustomed," the 1208 groups told the pope, "*the shoes being cut away at the top and shaped in a special and distinct style*, so that we will openly and clearly be recognized as separated in body as in heart from the Poor of Lyons [Valdés' original followers]."

But in spite of their supposed change of heart and reconciliation to the Roman church, barely six months later the pope was accusing them of only making the first (Valdés') error worse.

"They allege," he wrote them, "that you have in no way at all changed the garb denoting that superstition which formerly caused scandal among Catholics. Furthermore, on account of your doctrinal instruction, which you deliver to your brethren and friends in your schools, many have been drawn away from the Church . . . take care to still the scandal which grows more serious because of the former garb which you still keep . . . in the future not to bind themselves to the custom of wearing *sandals open at the top* nor to wear such footgear . . ."

Another source account tells us: "But the lord pope accused them of certain unsound practices in their way of life, to wit, that they cut away the tops of their shoes and so walked about as if barefooted . . . But in their stead, the lord did authorize certain other who were becoming known under the name of 'the Lesser Poor' [the 1210 group]. These rejected the unsound and scandalous practices described above, but traveled completely barefoot both summer and winter . . ." (Wakefield and Evans, *Heresies of the High Middle Ages, Selected Sources Translated*

and *Annotated*, 1969, pages 226-229. Most of the previous basic information in this article may be found in this work).

But does this mean there is no evidence that Waldenses ever kept God's Sabbath? Not quite. But it involves Waldenses of somewhat later date.

### The Sketchy Evidence

Modern Waldenses, those whose church and ancestors have long been settled in the so-called Waldensian valleys of the Cottian Alps in Lombardy, Italy, are today observers of Sunday. And they disclaim any suggestion that their ancestors ever kept the seventh day. It may be so. At any rate, their denial is not especially significant since there were others not in those valleys.

A papal bull of 1267 was addressed to the ruler of upper Burgundy "to arouse his zeal against 'the defenders of Waldensian heresy and certain adepts to Judaism, very numerous in his domains.' These adepts were called Judaizing Christians [*not* proselytes to Judaism] because they . . . wished to sanctify the Seventh Day in memory of the Mosaic Sabbath. . . . It was especially in the Jura and the mountains of Doubs that these Judaizers were to be found during the thirteenth century" (Newman, *Jewish Influence on Christian Reform Movements*, p. 403).

An inquisitorial record of 1391 states of the Waldenses in Poland that they "prayed on the seventh day" (Gordon Leff, *Heresy in the Later Middle Ages*, vol. 2, p. 464). Obviously this was a special observance of the day, for there would have been no reason for recording the fact of simple ordinary prayer.

Surely it was not without reason that Bossuet, the Catholic bishop of Meaux, wrote about 1700: "I conceive that the old Waldenses, who rejected all the festivals of the [Catholic] church, and went back to the original Sabbath, were much more consistent with themselves, than these gentlemen, the modern Protestants who, though they discard all the others, still retain the Dominical day" (quoted in Tamar Davis, *Sabbatarian Churches*, emphasis ours).

During the 15th century, a Waldensian ordination was involved in beginning the organization in Bohemia properly known as the Unity of the Brethren, and slanderously as Picards. Says the *Seventh-Day Adventist Bible Students Source Book*, item 1469, "They (the Picards, or Waldensian Brethren) do not celebrate the feasts of the divine Virgin Mary and of the Apostles;" says an old Latin record, 'some (observe) only the Lord's

day. Some indeed celebrate the Sabbath with the Jews.'"

Another report speaks of Sabbathkeepers burned at Toulouse in 1492. And one other Waldensian influence seems logical. After Luther nailed his challenge to Rome to the church door, there were Sabbathkeepers among the "Anabaptists" who then also dared take a stand.

### God's Responsibility and the Christian's

*So what shall we say? Just this: It is God's responsibility to bring His Sabbath to the attention of those whom He calls. And it is possible for a person to be totally sincere and dedicated to the service of God and never yet have had the Sabbath truth made plain to him or her! If God, for reasons of His own — much more valid than any human reasoning we might have about it — has chosen never in a person's lifetime to reveal it, that is His business. We cannot justifiably say that a person was not of God simply because he did not know which day belonged to God — especially if his or her life strongly indicates the contrary.*

Mr. Herbert Armstrong has understood and acted on this principle for many years. Mr. Armstrong has even baptized — on simply being convinced of a person's genuine repentance and willingness to obey whatever was later shown to be God's command — before the knowledge of the true Sabbath was given.

One person I know of was a member of my own family who, after baptism, did exactly as Mr. Armstrong expected. A simple hint was given, as Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong departed, to write for the booklet *Which Day Is the Sabbath of the New Testament?* As a result the Sabbath was studied, proven — and then kept.

But knowledge is one thing; acting on such knowledge is another. Let's not allow ANYONE to have excuse for asking for baptism, knowledgeably, but with secret or subconscious intent to continue with a "Sunday" organization.

God can call to repentance and even grant His Holy Spirit placing one in His spiritual church before He reveals His Sabbath. The significant factor is the person's willingness to step out and keep it when He does reveal it.

Sabbath breaking is a sin, like murder, stealing, adultery, etc. In the Old Testament it was punishable by death for those Israelites who disobeyed the commandment. It *must* be repented of as soon as realized and discovered. □