

Testimony of the Life of the Waldenses By their Inquisitor Reinerius Sacho

“Témoignage rendu aux vaudois par un inquisiteur” (testimony given of the Waldenses by an inquisitor), in Franck Puaux, *Histoire de la Réformation Française* (Paris: Michel Lévy Frères, 1859), 1:424-25; taken from Jacques Benigne Bossuet, *Histoire des variations des églises Protestantes*, 11:55-54 (sic); translated into English by Thomas P. Johnston.

The inquisitor, Reinerius Sacho, after having spent his early youth in the midst of the Waldenses, abandoned them and became their persecutor; the force of the truth constrained this man of blood to bear to his victims a most beautiful testimony. “The primary [or first] error of the heretics,” says he in his *Summâ de hæreticis*, “is their contempt for the power of clerics (*ecclésiastique*)... They affirm that they alone are the Church of Christ, the successors of the apostles; they have the apostolic authority, and the keys to bind and to unbind. They view Rome as the prostitute in Revelation, chapter 17... They completely reject feasts, the orders, fasts, blessings, the offices of the Church and other similar things. They speak against the consecrated churches, cemeteries, and other things of the same nature, signaling these as the inventions of greedy priests who want to increase their revenues, and swindle people out of offerings and money.

“Some from among them hold that baptism is without any advantage for children, because they cannot believe... They say that the bishops, the clergy, and other religious orders, amount to nothing more than the scribes, the Pharisees, and other persecutors of the apostles. They think that the body and the blood of Christ are the real sacrament, and pretend that it is figurative that the bread is called the body of Christ, in the same way as it is said: *The rock was Christ*... They celebrate the Eucharist in their assemblies, repeating the words of the Gospel, and participating together in this ordinance, imitating the Last Supper¹ of the Lord... They reject extreme unction.

“Even though they praise continence, they satisfy nevertheless their carnal lusts by the most dirty means, explaining in this way the words of the Apostle: *It is better to be married than to burn*. Better to satisfy one lust by a shameful act than to conserve temptation in one’s heart.”² But they hide these things as much as they can, for fear of incurring blame.

“There is no purgatory, say they, and all those who die pass immediately to heaven or hell; hence, the prayers in the Church for the dead are without use; those who are in heaven have no need for them, and those who are in hell cannot be relieved. If we believe them, the saints in the heaven do not hear the prayers of the faithful, their bodies rest lying in the earth, and their spirits are so far from us that they would not be able either to listen to our prayers, nor to see the honors that we accord them... Since then the Waldenses mock all of our feasts that we celebrate in honor of the saints, and all the acts by which we testify to them our veneration.

The force of the truth extracted a testimony no less honorable for them, when it caused Reinerius to say: “Of all the sects that have been or that are still, there has never been one more pernicious for the church as that of the Waldenses, and this for three reasons. First she is the oldest of all, some find her to go back to the pope Sylvester,³ and others back to the time of the Apostles. Next, she is more extended than any other, for there is barely a place on earth that she has not penetrated. Finally, quite different from the other sects, who inspire at first horror among those who hear their pernicious doctrines, by the horrible blasphemes that they vomit, this one

¹In French Communion or the Lord’s Supper is called *La Sainte Cène*, or “the Holy Scene,” in this case it is simply called “the Scene.” There is also a word in French for scene (scene), but the mystical significance of the Last Supper as a type for the Eucharist seems to have led to this borrowing of the term.

²Notation of Puaux: “Reinerius slanders the Waldenses and seems to strong in his feelings. One passage in their apology relative to this accusation of being libertines, will suffice to refute him. It is this odious vice, say the Waldenses, that enticed David to kill his faithful servant, that pushed Amnon to corrupt his sister Tamar, and that consumed the inheritance of the prodigal son. Balaam chose it to make the children of Israel sin, which occasioned the death of twenty-four thousand persons. It is the same sin which occasioned the blinding of Samson and the fall of Solomon. The beauty of the woman have made a number perish. Fasting, prayer, and distance, such are the only remedy to oppose this evil. We can win over other vices by battling, but this one we can only surmount through fleeing... Joseph provides us an example.”

³Notation of Puaux: “Sylvester, bishop of Rome, contemporary of Constantine (4th Century).

**“Testimony of the Life of the Waldenses”
By Their Inquisitor Reinerius Sacho**

seduces the world *by the appearance of great piety*. The Waldenses lead a *righteous life* before men, and believe as regards God all that there is to believe. They accept *all the articles and symbols of the apostles*, only they blaspheme against the Roman Church and the clergy.”

Thus speaks of the Waldenses the inquisitor Reinerius, of which Bossuet in his book of *Variations*, says that he sincerely manifested the good and the bad and told us better than any other the differences of the sects of his time.