

Sabbath Reform in Scandinavia

THERE were many Sabbath-keepers in Norway even in the days of Catholicism. The Sabbath seems to have been brought to the Scandinavian countries partly by the Waldenses, and partly as a direct work of the Spirit of God. But Rome was no more favourable towards the Sabbath there than in other parts of the world. When the Inquisition of the twelfth century scattered the Waldenses, they were forced to flee to more obscure places and to countries lying on the outskirts of civilization, and as the persecution continued, they gradually drifted into Scandinavia. Then, too, in the Catechism that was used during the fourteenth century, the Sabbath commandment read thus: Thou shalt not forget to keep the seventh day. (This is quoted from Documents and Studies Concerning the History of the Lutheran Catechism in the Nordic Churches. p. 89. Christiania: 1893). We are told by Swedish historians that the Sabbath-keeping public claimed that angels had appeared to them, instructing them to keep the Sabbath on Saturday. Of the church council held at Bergen, Norway, August 22, 1435, we read:

The first matter concerned a superstitious keeping holy of Saturday. It had come to the ear of the archbishop that people in different places of the kingdom, partly from the weakness of nature, partly by the deceptions and promptings of the devil, had ventured to adopt and keep holy days, which neither God nor the holy Church had ordained or sanctioned, but on the contrary is against the commands of both, namely the keeping holy of Saturday, which Jews and heathen used to keep, but not Christians. It is strictly forbidden - it is stated - in the Church-Law, for any one to keep or to adopt holy days, outside of those which the pope, archbishop, or bishops appoint. - *The History of the Norwegian Church under Catholicism, R. Keyser, Vol. II, p. 488. Oslo: 1858.*

At another church conference, held at Oslo, the next year, the same archbishop commanded:

It is forbidden under the same penalty to keep Saturday holy by refraining from labor. - *Id., p. 491.*

In another old publication from nearly the same period we find this accusation against the priests:

Also the priests have caused the people to keep Saturdays as Sundays. - *Theological Periodicals for the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Norway, Vol. I, p. 184. Oslo: P. T. Mallings, 1871.*

Sabbath-keepers continued to keep the Bible Sabbath in Norway, in spite of persecution, for we read of new laws made against them in 1544:

I, Christoffer Whitefeldt, [governor] over Bergenhus, Stavanger, and Vaardoem, greet all you peasants kindly and with good wishes, who live in the district of Bergen. Dear friends: Mr. Gieble Pederson, superintendent of the district of Bergen, related to me that some of you have kept Saturday holy, especially at Arendal in Sogen, contrary to the ordinance given you last year by Peter Ottesen, my brother, and Niels Bernsen, who had charge of the palace by my authority, in my absence, in which you have done very wrong, and would receive great damage if I would punish you. But, however, because of the solicitation of Mr. Gieble, the superintendent, I will still forbear with you. But now it has been determined at the public Parliament for these two districts, Bergen and Stavanger, that whoever is found keeping Saturday holy shall be fined ten mark in money. So now ye know what ye have to go by.

In the next place you are rebellious and disobedient in the Holydays you keep, and are not willing to be satisfied with those which the priest announces which are contained in the ordinance. We now command you in the name of His Majesty, the King, that you solemnly obey the ordinance of His Grace. And whoever disobeys, he shall by my sheriff be punished for his rebellion as a rebellious and disobedient citizen, and be fined ten mark. - *History of King Christian the Third, Niels Krag and S. Stephanius, Vol. II, Statutes and Ordinances, p. 379. Copenhagen: 1778.*

In Sweden and Finland

Sabbath-keepers were also scattered over Sweden and Finland. Bishop L. A. Anjou says that there was a peaceful but continued movement on foot in these two countries for the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath, one that required the sanctification of Saturday as Sabbath day. The first known origin of this goes back to the middle of the preceding century, when King Gustav I, in the year 1554, wrote a letter of warning to Finland against those who alleged that they through visions and dreams had come to the conviction that famine, etc., were God's punishments because people did not keep Saturday holy. In the beginning of the seventeenth century the same faith was found in Sweden, and even there it was founded on alleged revelations. It was zealously opposed in 1602 by Charles IX. - *Swedish Church History from the Meeting at Upsala, Year 1593, p. 353. Stockholm: 1866.*

Segregated from any movements opposed to the church, we must consider those who kept Saturday holy, and on this day abstained from labor, but otherwise did not separate themselves from the

church. We do not find that those who held this view . . . observed any other Jewish habits or customs. . . . Had this movement been connected with anything that could be considered apostasy from Christianity, then without doubt the accusations against it would have been stronger and the laws more stringent.

Independent of older influences, the inculcation of Sabbath-keeping could easily bring up the question of keeping Saturday holy, by questioning whether the Sabbath law had any validity if it was not applied to the Sabbath day previously appointed in the Old Testament. . . . The customary reading of the Bible, and the appeal to the law of God . . . could attract the attention to the commandment which required Saturday to be kept holy.- *Id.*, p. 855.

This keeping of Saturday holy did not stand alone, at least in most cases, but was part of the Pietism [pious worship] of that age, and was connected with sermons on repentance and warnings against prevailing sins and vices. - *Id.*, p. 855.

Theodore Norlin, another important Swedish Church historian, says of these Sabbath-keepers:

We can trace these opinions over almost the whole extent of Sweden of that day - from Finland and northern Sweden, Dalarna, Westmanland, Nerike, down to West-Gotland and Smaland.

In the district of Upsala the farmers kept Saturday in place of Sunday. . . . At several places they pressed their requests so vehemently upon the priests, that they yielded to their wishes to the extent of beginning to hold services on Saturday. At the time of Gustaf Adolphus we see this peculiar faith arising at different places in the country.

About the year 1625 . . . in West-Gotland, Smaland, and Nerike, revelations and visions of angels were related in which the necessity of keeping Saturday holy was strictly commanded, and in which warnings were given against the sins that were secretly practiced. This religious tendency became so pronounced in these countries, that not only large numbers of the common people began to keep Saturday as the rest day, but even many priests did the same, which gave occasion for no small schism. *History of the Swedish Church, Vol. 1, part 2, chap. 3 p. 256.*

But the enemy of souls could not endure this revival of primitive Christianity, and Sabbath-keeping in Sweden and Finland was finally suppressed. But when the work of the Holy Spirit was suppressed in these Scandinavian churches, the same dire fruit of spiritual declension was seen, as formerly in the apostolic church. Whenever the warning voices are hushed up, spiritual darkness sets in. Dr. Scharling, Lutheran Professor of Theology, says:

Luther's great work of Reformation was still far from having been accomplished, it was followed by a continual retrogression, a deeper sinking of the religious consciousness, until it at last reached its zero point in Ritualism. . . . Little by little the Evangelical church becomes chilled, . . . and it takes on an unpleasant similarity to the Romish church. - *Menneskehad og Kristendom, Vol. 2, p. 248.*

A church in a lukewarm condition does not usually concern itself with spiritual reforms. But in the early part of the nineteenth century, when the great spiritual revival passed over almost every country, and affected nearly all denominations, Sabbath reform came to the front again, and deeply impressed the honest in heart. We find leading men in different denominations reaching out to find Bible proof for the change of the Sabbath, and when this could not be found, they either accepted the Bible Sabbath, or gave up their former faith in the immutability of the Ten Commandments.

The Lutheran Church in America

Pastor A. C. Preus, in an article in *Kirkelig Maanedstidende* [Monthly Church Tidings], of August, 1855, endeavored to quiet an agitation on the Sabbath question that had arisen in Wisconsin, by claiming that the Sabbath commandment simply required the keeping of one day in seven. He wrote:

It is a moral law, founded on a moral necessity, that a rest day must be appointed; . . . but it is ceremony, resting on outward occasion of circumstances, whether one day or another is established.

We know that the law is a lamp and the commandment a light, and woe be to us if we would abolish even one of the least commandments and teach men so. But the law, the unchangeable moral law, which proceeds from the nature of God, says nothing about which day. The third [fourth] commandment simply reads thus: Remember that thou keep holy the rest day, it does not say the seventh day! (The Catholic Church dropped the second commandment out of their catechism, and Lutherans followed the same numbering, making the Sabbath command the third. In the Lutheran catechism it reads as Pastor Preus here quotes it, and not as given in Exodus 20: 1-17).-, 1855, pp *Kirkelig Maanedstidende, August. 94-97. Inmansville, Wis.*

A few Lutheran ministers saw in this article a direct blow against the sanctity of Sunday, others took exception to the claim that the Sabbath commandment is binding on us. The struggle that ensued is spoken of in their book on *The Jubilee of the Norwegian Synod, 1853-1903*, in the following statement:

The struggle which began against the sects outside of the Lutheran Church thus soon became a controversy with those who had false ideas within the Lutheran Church itself, a controversy which was kept up till well towards the eighties, when it gradually died away, because other points of dispute arrested the attention. - *Festskrift, p. 289. Decorah, Iowa: 1903.*

During this long controversy much was written in their official organ, *Kirkelig Maanedstidende* [Monthly Church Tidings], in *Emigranten*, and in their Synodical Reports, especially from 1863 to 1866, and discussions continued in their Synods. The one side held to the Explanation of Luther's Catechism (Oslo, 1905), which says that the ceremonial law was abolished at the cross, but that the moral law, which is contained in the Ten Commandments, . . . is still in force. . . . because, it is founded on God's holy and righteous nature, and hence is immutable as God Himself. - *Pp. 5, 6.*

The other party said:

Either the words in the 3rd [4th] commandment regarding the seventh day on which God rested are binding on us, and then we must and shall keep Saturday, or, if these words are not in force for us, then we have nothing to do with any definite day, or any day whatever. . . . We notice that the 3rd [4th] commandment does not speak of one day in seven, or a seventh day, but only and solely of the seventh day, that is Saturday. As long as they will acknowledge this, which every honest Christian with common sound judgment certainly must, and they also acknowledge that the New Testament nowhere institutes or commands any other day, or says that one day in seven shall be taken in its place, then it also must be acknowledged that there is no word in Scripture to sustain the assertion that one day in seven is a moral command. *Record of the First Extraordinary Synod of the Norwegian-Evangelical-Lutheran Church in America, held at Holden, Minnesota, reported in Kirkelig Maanedstidende [Monthly Church Tidings], Aug. 1, 1862, p. 232.*

To say, that the commandment regarding outward rest (Exodus 20: 10, 11) [refers to one day in seven] is only arbitrary misrepresentation and falsification of God's word, for it does not say every seventh, but the seventh day, on which God rested, and that, every one knows, was Saturday. If therefore this commandment concerning outward rest for man and beast is in force as a moral command for us Christians, then we must rest on Saturday, as that is the only day on which such rest was commanded.- *Id., April 1, 1862, p. 99.*

Having called attention to the fact that the fourth commandment enjoins observance of the definite seventh day (Saturday) they then referred to Romans 14 and Colossians 2 as proof that the Sabbath was

abolished. But those who held that the moral law is still in force, answered:

In regard to the places, Romans 14 and Colossians 2, these refer . . . to the appointed days of the Old Testament, which the contents in the whole chapter show. . . . By Sabbaths is not to be understood the weekly Sabbath, which, before Moses, yea already at Creation, was instituted [Genesis 2], but [they refer] to other feasts, which have been types of Christ, and ceased at Christ's coming. - *Id.*, *September, 1863*, pp. 271, 272.

The other side answered:

Sunday, no doubt, had sacred memories, but so had the day of Christ's death and the day of His ascension, without Friday and Thursday thereby becoming appointed days for weekly meetings, and even if Sunday had the most glorious memories, there would not be in that the least obligation to keep it. . . . After all, examples prove nothing, they only illustrate what has already been proved. And here it actually is incumbent on those who would make Sunday-keeping a divine ordinance to show us a definite command of God for it. - *Id.*, *September, 1863*, pp. 261, 262.

The former, in their review, quoted Matthew 5:17-19 and James 2:10, 11, and declared:

If it is so dangerous to offend on one commandment, what must it be then to wholly throw away one commandment? . . . God has distinctly commanded that every tittle in His law is to be kept. And how it will fare with those who take away from, or add anything to, God's word we can read in Revelation. [The writer then referred to the fate of the priests of Baal in 1 Kings 18] - *Id.*, *April, 1866*, p. 103.

We recognise that this was an argument in which two groups of Sunday-keepers were engaged, and in which each in his own way was trying to present reasons for the observance of the first day of the week. But in fact, the truths brought to light by this close study of the question prove that the fourth commandment enjoins the careful observance, not of one day in seven, but of the seventh day of the week in particular, that the Sabbath was instituted at creation, that while the ceremonial feasts, which were types of Christ, ceased at the cross, the seventh-day Sabbath did not pass away at that time, that there is no definite command in Scripture for Sunday observance, and that those who attempt to remove a jot or a tittle from the holy law of God by substituting the first day of the week for the seventh day fall under the curse of Revelation 22:19.

In Norway

The controversy in America had its counterpart in Norway and Denmark. At the Ecclesiastical Association in Christiania [Oslo], February 8-10, 1854, and at the Theological Association of the Deans of Drammen, held August 15, 1854, the Sabbath question was the great subject for discussion. At first some seemed to think only of the proper observance of Sunday, but the question soon arose, how the sacredness of the Sabbath could be transferred from the seventh to the first day of the week. Pastor Kaurin thought it could, but Pastor W. A. Wexels declared that this could not be done, for God Himself cannot transfer the reason for sanctifying the seventh day (God's rest at creation) to another day. Besides this we have no certainty of any transference of the day. - *Theologisk Tidsskrift for den Norske Kirke, Vol. VI, pp. 629, 630. Oslo: P. T. Mallings, 1855.*

Some of the speakers felt that the only way to get around this troublesome question was to teach that the Sabbath commandment was abolished, but Dean Lange found it incomprehensible that any one who knew the sermon on the mount [Matthew 5] could urge the abolition of the Sabbath commandment. - *Id., p. 533.* And Wexels pointed out that the Sabbath commandment forms such an integral part of the moral law that what was said against one command affected the whole law. But he felt that as Christ had finished His work on the cross Friday evening, and rested on the Sabbath, the Christians have [thus an appeal] on Saturday to live in . . . the memory of the Lord's own rest after His work on earth was finished, and of the Sabbath rest. . . . If these sacred Sabbath-memories, considered as the common property of the church, should seek an expression in a united outward service on Saturday, it would be entirely becoming. - *Id., pp. 608, 609.*

During these long debates one cannot but see a carefully worded attempt to return to the only Bible Sabbath, but who had the courage of a staunch reformer, daring to stand out alone on Bible truths?

Dean Fr. Schiorn, of Oslo, says:

It has been claimed, that the relation of Jesus to the Sabbath commandment was one of protest against the continued validity of this command in the New Testament. On the whole it may be safely considered that the effort to remove the Decalogue as the unchangeable rule of divine authority can be traced principally to the fact that they want to blot out the Sabbath commandment. They can, of course, see, that it is impossible to take this one commandment out of the series of commandments as long as they acknowledge the other

nine binding and obligatory. The Ten Commandments form such a definite circumscribed unity that they must stand or fall together. So they would sooner let all fall than to let the third [fourth] commandment remain standing. - *Relation of the New Testament to the Old Testament Legislation*, p. 11. Oslo: 1894.

It is clear also that this commandment belongs to the divine law for the church. It has always been a mystery to me, why many have such a living interest in getting this commandment blotted from the Decalogue. That the enemies of Christianity want the Sabbath day, or its divine validity, removed, that I can naturally understand. But why living Christians, zealous workers in the church, want it removed, that I cannot understand. - *Id.*, p. 12.

Has Jesus anywhere expressed Himself against the Sabbath commandment or the continuance of its validity? Has He ever violated it, or advised His disciples to violate it? Never! He has combated the misuse of the Sabbath commandment by the Pharisees in the same way that He combated their misuse of prayer, fasting, tithing, almsgiving, etc., that is, all self-righteous piety by works, all spiritless use of the Sabbath, but never the Sabbath commandment itself. . . . He says (Mark 2:27): The Sabbath was made for man. . . . God gave man - not only the Jews - the Sabbath . . . and He has protected this His gift by a definite command, which has its continued validity for the new covenant people as well as for the people of the old covenant, because their need and circumstances are essentially the same.

When it is said that the third [fourth] commandment does not obligate the church, because Jesus has not imposed on us any Sabbath commandment, then this is to me very strange and incomprehensible talk. The commandment was already given in the law, which Jesus would not abolish, but fulfill. It was therefore a piece of superfluity for Jesus to give a Sabbath command. He, as Lord of the Sabbath, has caused His church to retain it, for which His church owes Him the very greatest thanks. - *Id.*, pp. 14, 15.

On the other hand Pastor L. Dahle declared:

The third [fourth] commandment is abolished for us Christians, and has no more as a command any binding claim.

It is a false imagination, if any one thinks he obeys the third [fourth] commandment in the law of Moses by keeping holy the first day (Sunday) instead of the seventh; for the commandment does not at all speak of one day in seven, but of the seventh day of the week. If therefore the commandment continued to be in force, then without doubt, were the Jews and the Adventists right, when they say that if we will obey God's command, we must keep Saturday holy. There

cannot be the least doubt about this. Every attempt to explain away this fact will and must fail.

It is therefore only an imagination that we keep holy our Sunday according to the requirements of the third [fourth] commandment.

Consequently it is an established fact, that if the third [fourth] commandment is still in force, then we must acknowledge the Adventists to be right, and begin to keep Saturday holy. If we are unwilling to do this, we must prove from the word of God that the Sabbath commandment is abolished in the New Testament and is no more binding on us Christians. *The Adventists, Sabbath, and Sunday, pp. 23, 24. Stavanger: 1903.*

Pastor K. A. Dachsel says, significantly:

For this reason many godly Christians have solemnly upbraided the Christian church for keeping Sunday instead of Saturday: it [the church] can have no right to change God's commandment, and if in the catechism the whole commandment had been embodied verbatim from Exodus 20: 8-11, as has been done in the Heidelberg Catechism, then we should still keep Saturday holy, and not Sunday. - *Edifying Instruction in the Catechism, p. 24. Bergen: 1887.*

Thus we see how the truth was forced upon the minds of leading churchmen by this prolonged discussion, and all were given the opportunity to make their choice. But, as is always the case, no one wishes to step out alone, they wait for all to step out in a body, a thing which has never occurred during the whole history of the world. God's work is an individual matter, not a mass movement.

In the discussion carried on in Denmark, Bishop Skat Rordam and Dr. Fr. Nielson took the same stand as Pastor L. Dahle in Norway, and The Norwegian Synod in America, that the Sabbath commandment was abolished, but that the church keeps Sunday as a proper church regulation. (See Bishop Rordams' remarks on p. 108).

On the other side stood Dean C. O. C. E. Krogh; Pastors John Clausen, Wilh. Beck, I. Vahl, P. Krag, A. G. Fich, and I. S. D. Branth, who declared that we have not nine, but ten commandments. And the Ten Commandments are God's commandments for all men in all ages. It is that law which Christ would not destroy, but fulfill, and the Sabbath commandment is a part of it, declared Dean I. Vahl. Pastor P. Krago said:

When Paul in the letter to the Colossians speaks about the law being abolished by Christ, he refers to the middle wall that separated Jews and Gentiles, the law of Moses. The Ten Commandments, in which Moses had no part, were given by God's own voice, and this God wrote with His own hand as an evidence that they should be in force

for all times. - *Report of the Second Church Meeting in Copenhagen, Sept. 13-15, 1887, P. Taaning, pp. 68, 69. Copenhagen: 1887.*

The reports of these discussions are very interesting and illuminating, but our limited space does not permit us to quote further. This, however, is sufficient to show how God led one by one of the leading denominations to investigate the Sabbath truth, and offered them the grand privilege of carrying the Reformation to completion. If they had accepted the Sabbath truth, He would have led them on step by step till they had reached the divine standard of the apostolic faith. Many of the truths of God's word, which the Roman church, during the Dark Ages, had buried beneath the rubbish of human tradition, still lay untouched, as costly jewels beneath the sand of centuries. These must be dug up, so that the remnant church could stand forth in its apostolic purity, possessing the complete faith which was once delivered to the saints; for those who shall meet the Lord in peace, when He comes in glory, must keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus. Jude 3; Revelation 14:12 12:17, 22:14

Three times, God in Revelations instructs His Saints to Keep His Commandments.