

THE Sabbath Sentinel

January–February 2006



"Thou Art the Potter, I am the clay."

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

"...the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath."

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January–February 2006 Volume 58, No. 1 Issue 517

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The Priests of the Religion of Evolution



Many readers of this column will recognize the names and the issues involved in the science standards debate before the Kansas State Board of Education (BOE). We here in America's hinterland (or "fly-over country" as some refer to it) are in the middle of a battle over whose god will be served.

Of course, the way this row over science standards for the state's public schools has been portrayed in the press is very reminiscent of the battle that took place during Elijah's time. The prophet Elijah summoned Israel to Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18) and told the people that they must choose which god they would serve, the LORD (YHWH) God of Israel or the pagan god Baal. The press corps of Elijah's day, the 450 priests of Baal (and their political cheerleaders, King Ahab and Queen Jezebel), made a lot of noise about how their god was the true god. They shouted, danced, cut themselves, and, in general, made utter fools of themselves, in order to promote a lie, that Baal was the true god. Elijah, on the other hand, was a political action committee of one. He stood his ground on behalf of the real God, and the power of that real God proved to be on his side. He totally vanquished the priests of Baal. Elijah succeeded for one reason; truth, hence God, was his ally, and the truth proved to be more powerful than the lie of a false god.

So it is with this brouhaha over science standards. Just like the priests of any false god, the clerics of the religion of evolution will go to any length to prevent the truth from being known or even discussed. Like the sacred writings of the followers of some quirky ancient deity, the scrolls of modern secular science are considered holy writ. As such, any thoughtful examination of these "sacred" writings is considered blasphemy. Doubters of the secular gods of evolution are punished, or worse yet, banished to the outer reaches of academia. Research funds are cut and the labs are purged to cleanse the collegiate temples of any vestige of the infidels.

As to the specifics of the Kansas case, there is nothing in the new science standards for the state that even mentions Intelligent Design (ID) or Creationism. During the hearings prior to the writing of the standards, the Kansas state BOE let it be known that they were going to allow a discussion of Intelligent Design at the hearings. Proponents of ID, including a number of scientists, were allowed to speak to the BOE. The board also issued an invitation to evolutionists to present their critique of ID and the presentations made by Intelligent Design advocates. The evolutionists refused to present their case; they issued a call for a general boycott of the meetings. In short, they were never heard from (except for their uninformed and distorted proclamations about the proceedings to the newspapers and television cameras). They felt it was beneath them even to consider the subject of Intelligent Design.

The press coverage of the Kansas state BOE's attempt to put together new science standards was so perverted and patently false that state BOE chairman, Dr. Steve Abrams, had to issue a press release (that was given scant attention by the secular media) in order to let the public know the truth about the hearings and the new science standards. Dr. Abrams writes:

...The critics also claim that in the scientific community, there is no controversy about evolution. They then proceed to explain that I ought to understand something about this, because surely I can see that over a period of time, over many generations, a pair of dogs will "evolve." There is a high likelihood that the progeny several generations down the line will not look like the original pair of dogs. And then some of the critics will claim that this proves that all living creatures came from some original set of cells.

Obviously, that is one of the reasons that we tried to further define evolution. We want to differen-

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The Potter and the Clay

"Thou Art the Potter, I am the clay."

by Daniel Botkin



"Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, 'Why hast thou made me thus?' Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour?"—Romans 9:20-21

God is likened to a potter, not only in Romans 9 but also in Jeremiah 18. No doubt these passages of Scripture were the inspiration for the lines of a well-known hymn written nearly one hundred years ago: "Thou art the Potter, I am the clay. Mold me and make me after Thy will, while I am waiting, yielded and still."

Clay is a good material to represent man. The very first man, Adam (whose name means "man"), came out of the ground (*adamah* in Hebrew). Adam was a piece of lifeless clay until God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus clay reminds us of our humble origins and of the fact that we owe our existence to our Creator.

The frailty of clay vessels reminds us that human life is fragile. When my wife and I did volunteer work on the archeological dig around the Temple Mount in Jerusalem in 1976, we discovered, while sifting through the soil of New Testament times, that the most common archeological finds are usually bits and pieces of broken pottery. The millions of broken clay jars that lie buried in the earth remind us that the ground is not only our origin, it is also the destiny of our fleshly body." In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return" (Gen. 3:19).

Pliancy is another characteristic that clay shares with man. Clay is flexible; it can be easily manipulated and molded. This can be either good or bad, depending on who is molding and shaping us. We are either going to yield to the pressure of the world, the flesh, and the devil, and be conformed to the world, or we are going to yield to the hand of the Heavenly Potter, and be transformed by the renewing of our minds. There is no such thing as a truly "self-made man." Ev-

ery man is molded and shaped to some extent by his personal experiences, by others around him, and by God if he yields to the hands of the Heavenly Potter.

When I was an art student at Illinois State University, I took three semesters of ceramics. Learning to be a potter helped me to understand a little bit about how God labors as the Heavenly Potter. The various steps from preparation of the clay to the final firing of the finished piece reveal how God works on us.

To prepare the clay, all foreign objects must be removed from the lump of clay. Even a very small chip of wood or a tiny pebble can ruin the vessel at some point in the process if it is not removed at the very beginning. The foreign object that exists in man is sin, and it must be removed by the Potter. If sin is not removed, it will eventually destroy us. We will be a vessel that is not fit for the Potter's use. Sin is removed by the Potter through the sacrifice of His Son Yeshua, Jesus of

Nazareth. Allowing the Potter to take away our sin is the prerequisite to being shaped into a vessel for His use.

The clay is further prepared by kneading. It is very important to get every air bubble out, because

an air bubble inside the wall of the vessel can cause it to crack or explode during the firing. My pottery teacher taught us to knead the clay somewhat violently, occasionally throwing it down hard onto the table and punching it repeatedly. Sometimes the Heavenly Potter has to treat us that way in order to prepare us for His handiwork.

A potter has to continue kneading until the particle distribution is homogeneous. The texture of the clay must be consistent throughout. Our Potter kneads us until we have balance and consistency of character. Then we are ready to be put on the Potter's wheel.

When a lump of clay is put on the potter's wheel, it has to be centered. The potter does this by applying pressure to the outside of the lump as it goes round and round in circles. The Heavenly Potter likewise gets

A potter has to continue kneading until the particle distribution is homogeneous. The texture of the clay must be consistent throughout.

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2005 Scholarship Essay Contest

This year's contest was an exceptionally good one. We had 29 entries representing seven countries and at least twelve different Sabbath-observing fellowships and churches including, Seventh Day Adventist, United Church of God, Living Church of God, Church of God Seventh Day, Yahweh Assembly, and several others.

The judges this year were Bob Boley of Dallas, Texas (a former school teacher and long-time Sabbatarian), and Marsha Basner of Tulsa, Oklahoma (Marsha is a nutritionist, BSA board member and long time Sabbatarian). Both judges read the applications several times and took the necessary time to make sure each applicant met the requirements for the contest. They both did an extremely thorough job and an honest rendering of the rules of the contest. Thanks to both of them for their hard work.

It took a little longer this year to finish the entire judging process, and I would like to talk about this a little bit. When the deadline comes for the entries, they are first sent to Wyoming to Shirley Nickels, our office manager. She then puts them all in a package and sends them Fed Ex to me at my address in North Carolina. Once I receive them, I have to read through each application and enter the applicants' names, addresses, Sabbath affiliation and check their date of birth to make sure they are within the age limits of the contest. Next, I read each application and confirm the reference letters and make sure the applicant is a Sabbath observer. Then I put all the applications in alphabetical order. At that point, if something is missing from an application, I give the applicant a courtesy call to see whether it is something that could be arriving later or was misplaced. This year, I did not give courtesy calls if one of the directions had deliberately been ignored, such as, including a typed copy of the essay along with the written copy. I believe one must be able to follow basic directions in order to be successful in life. However, if I couldn't read their birth date or mailing address or something of that nature, I called the applicant to confirm the information I needed. I noted on my main spreadsheet what information was missing and whether it would require a deduction in points. Application items resulting in point deductions this year 1) two typed and handwritten essays 2) two reference letters 3) financial need statement 4) a photo. This is what I call the "precopy check point" which took me this year about ten hours to complete.

Next came the copying stage. I copied them personally which resulted in over 1500 copies being made as each judge needed a copy of the essays, the reference letters and the application. Due to a malfunction in the copy machine, I ended up copying them between two different copying places over three days. Next, I packaged them and sent them to each judge. This was before the Feast of Tabernacles that both of our judges observed, so they got them just slightly before the Feast.

After all the material was copied and sent to the judges, they started the process of reading, rereading, evaluating and judging of the application. Each judge prayed about this endeavor before beginning and took as much time as they needed to read through all of the material. First, they double-checked the spreadsheet I sent them which contained all of the data about the applicant. They then made sure the applications were complete. They then began the process of scoring the essays based on the 100 point scoring system I devised and reported their scores back to me. There were a couple of problems about the scoring because this year we took financial need into consideration, so the judges had to go back over and evaluate the applicants based on the financial data provided and award points according to this. Finally, the judging was complete and the scores were sent back to me for a final check and averaging the top three scores.

This year we experienced several delays in reaching a final tally due to health problems and serious computer problems, so I apologize for the delay. This was frustrating for all of us, and I'm sure it was for the applicants also.

All of us involved in the scholarship program are volunteers who are involved in work outside our duties to the BSA scholarship contest. I am very pleased with the job the judges did this year given the number of applicants and the hundreds of volunteer hours required to complete this task. We took our time in order to insure that the scoring was 100 percent fair.

Finally, we are giving away much larger scholarships this year. The prize for first place is \$1500, second place is \$1000, and third place is \$500. Because of the larger prizes this year and the fact that donations were really down most of 2005, the BSA Scholarship Essay Contest is going to take one year off. During 2006 we will be trying to increase donations to the scholarship fund so that we can offer Sabbatarian college students enough prize money to make it worth their while to enter our contest in 2007.

I have been blessed in my working with the scholarship program the last six or so years, and I look forward to continuing with the program in the future. Please continue to support our efforts with your prayers and donations, and by helping us spread the word as this is a completely 100 percent volunteer operation. We need 1) new judges each year from the different sectors of the Sabbatarian community, 2) people to help us to promote both the BSA and the scholarship program, 3) fundraising and donations so that we can have the money for the scholarships, and 4) publicity among all the Sabbath-keeping groups in their magazines, newspapers, youth camps, church groups and websites to promote the scholarship program and bring more awareness of it and the work of BSA at large.

Thank you all for your support, prayers and dedication to this very important part of the work of BSA. Our young people are the future of the truth of the Sabbath and our faith. Help us support them through this scholarship effort.

June Narber
Essay Scholarship Chair of BSA

Winners of the 2005 BSA Scholarship Essay Contest

We are very pleased to announce the winners of our 2005 contest. The winners are as follows:

First Place: Miss Tinenenji Banda of South Africa

Second Place: Miss Leslie Schwartz of California

Third Place: Miss Ashley Drakes of Mississippi

Each contestant was required to answer two of three questions in essay form. The contestant had a choice between two questions for the first essay. The second essay was to answer a mandatory question. The choices for Essay No. 1 were,

Choice A: How do you think that attending a university or college will affect your ability and/or desire to keep the Sabbath? What goals have you set for yourself in order to continue keeping the Sabbath during your college years and beyond?

Choice B: How do you think we can reach the younger generation with the Sabbath truth? Give some witness tips for Sabbath keeping youth who want to tell other youth about the Sabbath truth. How can they go about it? What should they do and what should they not do?

Mandatory Question: Refute Sunday keeping using the Bible supported with your own wording as to why it is wrong to observe Sunday according to God's law. Refute it based upon one of the major excuses Sunday keepers use to keep Sunday (for example: The Lord rose on Sunday morning; the Sabbath was for the Jews and the Old Covenant; Christ nailed the Sabbath to the cross, etc.).

First Place winner, Tinenenji Banda of Cape Town, South Africa, is a 22-year-old university student in the University of Cape Town Law School and a member of the United Church of God (UCGIA). Tinenenji keeps a very active schedule. She represented her school in the Model United Nations competition in Kenya and has been a representative of her university in the All Africa Annual Moot Court competition in Tanzania. She has worked as a *pro bono* legal aid advisor in the university legal aid clinic assisting indigent refugees, and has served as an aid at the Italian Orthopaedic Hospital in her native Zambia. Tinenenji is currently employed part time as a writing consultant in the Law Faculties Writing Center in the Cape Town Law School. In addition to these and many other activities, Tinenenji finds time to be a member of her church choir.



Essays

Choice A

As I am already in University and indeed in the final stages of my degree I can answer this question with the benefit of hindsight.

Personally, going to University posed a plethora of interesting challenges for my Sabbath observance. Away from the protective confines of home and the watchful eyes of parental authority, Sabbath observance for me necessitated a paradigm shift, one that involved moving away from Sabbath keeping because my parent's "commanded it," to keeping the Sabbath out of my own will, volition and desire to please GOD. Two specific challenges come to mind. The first of course was (and is) the incredible workload that inevitably comes with doing a law degree; Abstaining from schoolwork for the 24-hour period while fellow students were making headway, and not being able to attend tutorials and seminars scheduled for Saturday proved to be a test. Secondly, on the social front, being a fresher I was keen to forge friendships and 'fit in' during the first year of my university experience and on the whole, most socializing activities would happen on Friday night or Saturdays. It soon became clear that if I was to

hold fast to my faith and convictions I would have to set clear goals and standards that would enable me to continue with my Sabbath observance.

The goals I set for myself were as follows; from the onset I resolved to tell any potential friends or associates of my convictions so that they would respect my Sabbath observance and not pressure me to break the holy day. I also resolved to work efficiently during the week so I could afford to take out the 24 hours of commanded Sabbath rest. I resolved to get in touch with a local Sabbath keeping church to ensure that I keep the Hebrews 10:25 exhortation not to forsake meeting together with brethren of like mind. Most importantly I set the goal that I would be respectful but assertive with the university authorities concerning my beliefs well in advance so that if I had to write any tests on the Sabbath or attend any tutorials or teaching sessions an alternative arrangement could be made.

Beyond University, my goals to ensure that I continue to keep the Sabbath are similar. When I enter the working sphere I plan to inform my employer that I can diligently work 6 days of the week but the 7th day belongs to my Lord. I have also set the goal to continue regularly attending Sabbath services with my local congregation. Also, I have set the all-important goal not to be "unequally yoked" with an unbeliever as this may weaken my resolve to keep the seventh day Sabbath. I am praying that God will provide a mate in due season that will of his own accord respect and observe the Sabbath which I am convinced is an immutable and sacrosanct commandment of the living GOD.

Mandatory Question

To debunk Sunday keeping I am going to use the argument often used in mainstream Christianity circles, namely that the Sabbath is of the Old covenant, of the Jews and therefore obsolete and irrelevant for the Modern Day Christian.

As a point of departure the words of Jesus Christ himself (the initiator of the New Covenant) recorded in Matthew 5:18 are opposite. There, he unequivocally asserts that he did not come to destroy the law or the prophets (as he probably foresaw that some would in future contend that he did) but that *"one jot or one tittle [would] by no means pass from the law"* until all was fulfilled. Indeed Jesus Christ went on to say that whatever man would break the least of the commandments and teach others to do so, would be called least in the Kingdom of Heaven. This passage unambiguously states that The Sabbath (it is one of the commandments and part of the law) was not done away with. It is part and parcel of the new covenant and needs to be kept and observed as scrupulously as the other commands of GOD.

To justify Sunday keeping and dismiss the seventh-day Sabbath, the writings of the apostle Paul in Romans 14:5-6 where he states that "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike... He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it" are often used to suggest that Paul was insinuating that any day of worship is acceptable as long as the worship is "to the Lord." I submit that this a gross misunderstanding of Paul's writings; as the apostle Peter stated in his epistle, the writings of Paul are hard to understand and some men twist them to their own destruction. Nowhere in this passage does Paul indicate that the reference to days is to the seventh day Sabbath. Indeed it is Paul himself who stated that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12).

The Sabbath is not only for the Jews. As Jesus said, the Sabbath was made for man (all men). Indeed, In Acts it is clearly recorded that the gentiles the so-called "New Testament Christians" were keeping the Sabbath. Acts 13:42 says this; "the Gentiles begged that these words be preached to them next Sabbath." If the Sabbath were an Old Covenant requirement, irrelevant to the new covenant gentiles, then they would not have been keeping the Sabbath. They would not have waited for the words to be preached next Sabbath but would have advocated for any other day ... perhaps a sooner day!

If there is any doubt as to whether the Sabbath is relevant, it is my belief that the book of Hebrews should lay all such doubt to rest. The author of Hebrews in chapter 4:3-11 emphatically states that *"there remains then a Sabbath rest for the people of GOD."* Sunday keeping is not biblical and is a tradition of man not GOD. The Sabbath is as relevant today as it was at creation, at Sinai, in Jesus' time and in the time of the Apostles. We must all aim to keep it vigilantly as *"blessed are those who do his commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city"* (Revelation 22:14). Let us therefore as the book of Hebrews exhorts us *"make every effort to enter that rest."*

Second Place winner, Leslie Schwartz of Fremont, California, is a 21-year-old university student at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and a member of the United Church of God. Some of Leslie's activities have included performing arts, marching band, orchestra, chamber chorale, broadcast journalist for the UCLA television station, and Mortar Board Senior Honors Society. Leslie has also worked as a volunteer in peer counseling, Washington Hospital, UCLA Office of Students with Disabilities, and the UCLA Infant Development Program. In her church Leslie has often performed her music for church services and special events. She has been a Bible School instructor, camp counselor, and an article writer for her denomination's magazines.



Driver's licence photo

Essays

Choice A

I have grown up my entire life observing the seventh day Sabbath from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset as commanded and exemplified in the Bible. At a very young age, I understood that this time was special and very different from the rest of the week. My mom always cooked a nicer dinner and we lit candles and turned down the lights as classical music played softly in the background. My parents taught my little sister and me that this was "God's time" that we devote back to Him through our rest and relaxation on the Sabbath and attending Sabbath services to learn more about Him and His ways. Yet as I grew into a teenager and entered junior high, I suddenly began to feel left out when my parents told me I couldn't go to birthday parties, dances, or other outings on Friday night because it was the Sabbath. I didn't understand why they were being so mean, and I became upset when I had to stay home when all my friends were out having fun. The Sabbath no longer held the magic it used to, and I became frustrated with all its "restrictions" and "limitations" on my social life. However, I still continued to go to services and teach Sabbath school because I appreciated the godly knowledge I received and, in turn, could teach that to the younger generation.

When I came to UCLA as a freshman almost three years ago, so much of my life changed and I had to quickly adapt to a new environment as I shared a tiny dorm room with two other girls, neither of which were religious or had any understanding of the Sabbath. In addition to learning how to do my own laundry and pay my credit card bills each month, I was now solely responsible for the manner in which I decided to keep the Sabbath and had to find a way to get to church services each week because I didn't have a car in Los Angeles. When I tried to explain to my roommates that I couldn't go out with them on Friday nights to clubs or frat parties, or even downtown to grab dinner and a movie, they just didn't seem to understand. To them, the Sabbath was absurd. I grew confused and frustrated because they couldn't understand why I kept the Sabbath, when it was something I valued so much. They even brought loud friends back to our room after they came home from parties, ignoring that I was trying to do Bible study and hibernate from the world for that 24 hour period.

Instead of conforming to the norms of college and sacrificing my values and religious convictions, I adapted and changed my familiar routine in order to keep the Sabbath in an acceptable manner. I began to eat dinner earlier to avoid the crowded dining halls, and even brought my Bible with me to read during the meal or went to a local coffee shop to do Bible study. It was in these quiet moments that I first began to really take ownership of my Sabbath observance, realizing that I was no longer keeping it for my parent's approval so I could be considered "the good kid." In college, no one is there to check up on your actions, enforce a curfew, or make sure you continue to keep the Sabbath in the right way. It is up to the individual to make the personal decisions about the best way to live a life away from home and choose how to keep the Sabbath and follow God in this new and challenging environment. During this transitional period, I began to analyze my true motivations behind keeping the Sabbath, and grew into a much more introspective, disciplined, and successful person as a result.

As I continued to keep the Sabbath in college, each year seemed to get easier. During my second year at UCLA, I got to know other seventh day Sabbath keepers and we began to get together on Friday nights to go to dinner and do Bible study in small groups. Now, in my third year

as a Resident Assistant (RA), I have my own room where I can relax without being disturbed on the Sabbath. I make a nice cup of tea, turn on some jazz or worship music, and tune out the world. I've learned to schedule early Friday classes so I can finish my work long before the sun sets to prepare for the Sabbath in a relaxed way, instead of rushing to get everything done by sunset. Additionally, as an RA I have been able to answer many deep questions about religion and share my faith with residents on my floor who show an interest in learning more about why I keep the Sabbath. This year, I also started a small girls' study group that gets together weekly to talk about how to practically apply the Bible to our modern lives, as well as share our struggles, weaknesses, and successes with each other to motivate and encourage other Christians. These girls have become my closest friends through the times we've laughed, cried, but most of all, supported each other as we grow closer to God. All of these experiences have helped me strengthen my faith while keeping the Sabbath holy as God commands.

Moreover, I learned that while living on campus with new roommates can present challenges, it also provides numerous growth opportunities and experiences to be a "light" in a community filled with so much darkness (Matthew 5:14; Luke 11:35-36; Ephesians 5:8). While many students are out partying on Friday nights, I had the amazing opportunity to have deep religious discussions with other students on my floor and in my hall who were interested in why I was so "different." From these talks, I was delighted to find that when you share your faith in an open, honest, and appropriate way, many people are receptive to listening to what you have to say and even respect you more as a result. Some of my closest friendships in college were formed from our late night Sabbath talks. I also have tried different ways of practically applying my Bible study in order to keep me actively involved and interested in what I'm learning. I began to write articles for two of our international church publications, *The Good News* and *Vertical Thought*, a new magazine published for the teenage audience. Additionally, I have started to use my Bible study notes to write a book about how to live a godly life and develop a growing faith in God as a young, Christian female. All of these endeavors help to keep me spiritually strong and continue to motivate me to reach out to others and share my faith. Many of my close friends and even people I never met have complemented my charisma and enthusiasm for my religious beliefs, especially how much I love the Sabbath.

While I used to feel "left out" of the fun in high school when I couldn't go to Friday night dances or football games, I now realize what an awesome gift the Sabbath has become in my new college life. After working almost non-stop for six days during the week, going to class after class, balancing my three on campus jobs, and trying to squeeze in time for a social life, I know that when the sun sets on Fridays, I have a full 24 hours to relax, close my books, and focus on God, thanking Him for the wonderful blessings and opportunities He has given to me in my life. Instead of working straight through the weekend like many of my friends, I finally felt lucky and privileged to keep the Sabbath as it became the "delight" of my week (Isaiah 58:13). And many of my friends still marvel at how much more productive I am, even though I work a whole day less than them! I just smile, knowing that God has blessed my obedience by allowing me to use the time He has given me more efficiently.

I am no longer a "closet" Sabbath keeper. Rather, I am proud that I know God's truth and can live a "set apart" life in such a chaotic world on a college campus. I no longer feel burdened when I "can't" go out, but instead rejoice in keeping the Sabbath. I am proud of the deepening faith God has helped me develop over these past few years in college. I figure that with all the time God gives us to live our lives, the very least we can do is give one seventh of it back to Him, resting and honoring Him on His Sabbath day as He commanded. I have seen what living a lifestyle consumed by the world and its temporary pleasures has brought to so many of my friends at college, and it isn't anything compared to the godly blessings I continually receive.

When talking to high school students who are concerned about keeping the Sabbath in college, I always encourage them to seek God's advice and continually pray for guidance and direction when considering what decisions to make. Also, finding other college students who keep the Sabbath nearby will help keep you motivated as you remain faithful together. Above all, I encourage college Sabbath keepers to not become frustrated with the ways of this world when everyone and everything seems to be against you. God knew it would be this way and told us that the world would hate us and be against us because we are different (John 15:18). Think of how the world hated Jesus when He was on the earth; yet Jesus told us that He has "overcome the world" and sets an example for us to follow (John 7:7, John 16:33). Our present suffering is far less than what Jesus suffered while on earth, and can teach us important lessons in patience,

humility, and godly character through the trials we endure. We should use His example and not love the ways of the world (1 John 2:15-17) or try to become part of it, but rather “be transformed by the renewing of our minds” (Romans 12:2) as we follow God and the wonderful things He has laid before us (Luke 12:34). And remember that we are not alone in our trials because we always have God and each other to lean on for strength and encouragement, and have the ability to rise above the wrong ways we see exemplified in the world and persevere (Matthew 19:26, Ephesians 6:10, Philippians 4:13). Remember that God will not challenge us beyond what He knows we can handle (1 Corinthians 10:13) and we always have the wonderful opportunity to learn from the trials we are handed and become stronger lights to the world as Christians (Matthew 5:14, Romans 5:3-4, Philippians 2:15). We will be rewarded for following God’s ways and laws at the return of Jesus Christ (Proverbs 3:5, Matthew 16:27, Philippians 4:8), even if the world does not understand or accept us now. This is the hope that I hold as I live my daily life striving to become a better person and Christian.

As my younger sister enters college this upcoming fall, I know she, too, will have to make some tough decisions regarding her religious convictions and how she chooses to keep the Sabbath away from home. I hope that through sharing my personal experiences and how I have made the Sabbath work so wonderfully in my college life, not only as a day of rest, but also as a time to build a closer relationship with God, I will be able to motivate and encourage other peers and my sister who are struggling to keep the Sabbath in college, showing them that it is possible and even enjoyable! Now, every time I watch the sun sink below the horizon on Friday night I am reminded of God’s glory as the world seems to stop around me as the sky becomes illuminated in a sunset of beautiful colors, reflecting an earthly depiction of God’s magnificent Sabbath blessing. To me, there is no greater joy or promise.

Mandatory Question:

A Classroom Analogy — Does It Really Matter What We Do?

Imagine you are a student in an introductory English classroom your freshman year of college. It’s the first day of class and your professor passes out the syllabus for the course that outlines all of your assignments, including the major term paper you will have to complete this semester. The instructions say to write a 10-12 page analytical research paper on any of the American novels you will be reading in the course. It has to be size 12 font, Times New Romans, double spaced, one-inch margins, with a title page and footnotes and is due by the midterm date, in exactly five weeks. You scratch your head, thinking about how hard this assignment is going to be. You’ve never written a paper this long, and have never had so many specific guidelines to follow. A class that seemed so easy now seems impossible, and you leave the lecture hall feeling defeated.

Then a brilliant idea dawns on you! What if you decided to do a completely different assignment that would take less time and be so much easier? You could choose a book you already read, and write a five page paper (without doing research of course) and turn it in by the last day of class. That seems so much better, and besides, professors don’t *actually* read these long papers anyway, do they? That would take forever! Without considering your idea much further, you decide that this is the best thing to do and begin to create your own assignment instead of following your professor’s instructions. The date the paper is due comes and goes, and by the end of the course you proudly hand in your five page paper. Your professor looks at you sadly, shakes his head, and tells you that you’ve failed his course. You didn’t follow the instructions he gave you, and you didn’t pass. The reality of college hits you as you leave the lecture hall, feeling even more defeated than before.

Choosing to Obey — The Ultimate Spiritual Assignment

Most anyone would read the above description and wonder what the ignorant student must have been thinking that whole time; it’s common knowledge among students that if you fail to do an assignment correctly or follow the instructions you set yourself up for failure. And while failing a college course might seem catastrophic to some students today, failing God by not obeying and following Him has even harsher consequences. This classroom analogy directly relates to our spirituality, and is especially relevant to how Christians today choose to follow God and keep His commandments. Like the English professor and his detailed syllabus, God has given us specific instructions on how and when to worship Him through what is written in His Holy Bible; it is up to us to choose to obey and follow Him or choose to disobey Him and do our own thing, following the world.

When God gave us His commandments and Law (Exodus 20:1-17), which we are instructed to keep throughout our generations (Leviticus 23:14, 21, 31, 43), He did not want or expect us to add to or take away from His instructions (Revelation 22:18-19). So when God tells us when and how He wants to be worshipped, He expects us to follow Him, just as the English professor expects a paper that meets all his requirements. God's Law means so much to Him that He sacrificed His own son, Jesus Christ, to die for our sins, the sins of the world, and the sins of generations to come (John 3:16-17). If God's Law could be altered, changed, or even deleted from our religious practices, why would Jesus have had to die for an imperfect or changeable Law? The main point is that He wouldn't and didn't. The Law was established to be kept forever — as a lifestyle that isn't changed by the times, but is practically applicable at all times.

The Purpose of God's Law — Making Sense of the Sabbath

Christ came to earth originally to fulfill the Law (Matthew 5:17), not to change it or do away with it like much of the world has done today. However, today so many Christians feel that He has "done away" with the Sabbath and the Old Covenant, and use this excuse to justify their Sunday observance. Instead of following God's direct instructions regarding when and how to keep the Sabbath, many Christians decide to set their own standards for worshiping God. They do not question the traditional teaching of a Sunday service even when Jesus kept a seventh day Sabbath while on earth, setting the example for all of His followers on earth then and for generations to come. Rather, a majority of contemporary Christians try and uphold the false teaching of a Sunday observance through their misinterpretation of doctrine or lack of Biblical knowledge altogether.

It is important to examine the original intent of the Sabbath when it was first created. When God first instituted the Sabbath at the time of creation (Genesis 2:2-3), He sanctified it as a holy time to be kept from "evening to evening" — Friday night at sunset to Saturday night at sunset (Leviticus 23:32). The Sabbath is also a commanded weekly observance (Exodus 20:8-10), set apart from the rest of the week as a time of "solemn rest" and a "holy convocation" on which no work is to be done (Leviticus 23:3). God first established the Law and the Old Covenant with the Israelites (Exodus 19:5) and later introduced the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31) when Jesus came to earth to preach the gospel of the Kingdom of God and sacrifice Himself for the remission of sins (Matthew 26:28; Mark 14:24). Under the New Covenant, God's Law and Sabbath observance did not change (Matthew 5:17), and the following discussion touches upon historical evidence and scriptural analysis proving that the observance of a seventh day Sabbath is still true for believers today who seek to follow God and the example Jesus Christ left for believers.

The Origin of Sunday Observance — What Does the Bible Say?

Bluntly stated, it is impossible to prove Sunday observance through the Bible; when met with opposition on this issue, I ask Sunday keepers to show me where in the Bible God changed the Sabbath day, yet no one has taken me up on the challenge. Not surprisingly, it wasn't God who instituted a Sunday observance, but men in powerful positions throughout history who changed the day of worship through royal edicts and ordinances as a political move. After the New Testament was written, early followers of Christ continued to keep a Saturday Sabbath, modeling their worship after the Holy Days Jesus kept while on earth. It was not until 135 A.D. that references to Sunday as a day of Christian worship were found in the writing of Barnabas, appearing first during the reign of the Emperor Hadrian (117-135 A.D.).

At this time throughout the Roman Empire, Jews and early Christians were persecuted for keeping the Sabbath, as Hadrian prohibited Judaism and any similar religious practices. These oppressive measures influenced many early Sabbath keeping Christians in Rome to switch to Sunday worship, which was observed as a veneration of the sun (or "Son" of God as they said). The observance of Sunday instead of a Saturday Sabbath continued through the Protestant Reformation and became commonplace in both Roman Catholic and Protestant Christian denominations, who later justified Sunday worship as honoring Christ's resurrection. Yet, through all of these historical changes over thousands of years, there is still no biblical support for changing the Sabbath observance from Saturday to Sunday.

It is also important to note that Jesus and His disciples kept the Sabbath and the biblical Holy Days (Leviticus 23:1-44) while they were on earth, setting an example for what He expects and when and how He wanted and still wants to be worshipped. This did not change after His death and resurrection,

and should not change today. If God wanted to change the Sabbath or any of His laws, these changes should be clearly reflected in Scripture, rather than dictated by Roman authorities or sustained through traditions kept by contemporary church organizations.

The Writings of Paul — Why the Sabbath Is Still Kept Today

Paul is one of the most well-known Disciples of Christ. In his New Testament writings, he further upholds the Sabbath as one of God's commandments. In Romans he says that "the law is holy, and the commandment holy and just and good" (Romans 7:12), and also states, "For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man" (Romans 7:22). These scriptures show how important keeping God's commandments was to Paul, including honoring the Sabbath day.

In the New Testament, Paul writes on many topics to shed light on the proper way to obey and follow God. However, many contemporary Christians have misinterpreted his words in order to justify a Sunday observance. For example, some Christians today think keeping the Sabbath or the many laws commanded in the Bible is obsolete if they believe in Jesus in faith and are "saved." However, Paul refutes this version of shallow faith without works when he says the law is established through faith (Romans 3:31). Paul tells all believes that "for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified" (Romans 2:13), showing how obedience is an important and essential component to faith. Therefore, it is impossible to follow God in the way He intended and not just have faith without keeping His commandments, including the Sabbath.

Furthermore, some argue that Paul contradicts himself later in Romans when he writes, "One person esteems one day above another; another esteems every day alike. Let each be fully convinced in his own mind" (Romans 14:5). Many Christians believe that in this verse Paul abolishes keeping one day over another, justifying a Sunday observance. Yet upon closer scriptural analysis, the entire passage of Romans 14 says nothing about the Sabbath specifically; by reading the context around verse 5, we see that Paul is discussing eating meat and vegetarianism (verses 2-3, 6), and setting apart days for feasting and fasting, not for Sabbath observance or worship. Also, by comparing this passage with other passages on the same topic, such as 1 Corinthians 8, we can see that the word "unclean" in Romans 14:14 is referring to meat sacrificed to idols that is made unclean by this practice.

In another passage, Paul writes, "Therefore let no one judge you in food or in drink, or regarding a festival or a new moon or sabbaths, which are a shadow of things to come, but the substance is of Christ" (Colossians 2:16-17). Like Romans 14:5, some have interpreted this verse to mean that what day you keep is unimportant as long as you are worshiping God; yet when you think about this faulty logic, the interpretation makes no sense at all! Why would God specifically set apart and sanctify a certain day in His honor if it was that easy to abolish? Likewise, this was not Paul's intent either; he only said, "let no one judge you," which is very different from saying these practices are unnecessary or obsolete. Based on this close analysis of these two passages, and the fact that Paul would not contradict himself regarding keeping God's commandments as a disciple of Christ (compare to Romans 7:12-22); it seems rather unlikely and impractical to believe that Paul would disregard or devalue suggestions or options for following Him — they are a binding contract that is sealed through our ongoing obedience to His way.

When God created the world and humankind, He thought of everything. He knew we would find ways to become so busy and overworked that we would need a time to relax and focus on Him and the blessings He has brought to us in our lives. The Sabbath gives us this time every week. He created the Sabbath for us, placing Jesus as the Lord of the Sabbath (Mark 2:27-28). We show our love to God by keeping His commandments that are not burdensome and should not be viewed as restrictions on our life (John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:3). Rather, His commandments were designed to benefit our lives, showing us how to live life to the best of our ability, and becoming a true "delight" to keep in God's honor (Isaiah 58:13). The Sabbath was designed for this very purpose. Honoring and observing the Sabbath in the manner by which God designed is a primary way to show our love back to God, growing closer to Him through our obedience and desire to form a stronger relationship built upon His spiritual truths (1 John 2:3). And obedience to God is a choice we have to continue to make in order to strengthen our faith and deepen our spiritual relationship throughout our lives.

Third Place winner is Ashley Drakes. Ashley is from Greenville, Mississippi, and is a member of the Worldwide Church of God. Ashley is 20 years old and is studying Political Science at Tougaloo College in Tougaloo, Mississippi. After graduation she intends either to go on to law school or to pursue a master's degree in public policy so that she can help the underprivileged. Ashley is a Presidential Scholar and a McNair Scholar. She has been a youth counselor at camp, a childcare volunteer, and has worked with the homeless.



Driver's licence photo

Essays

Choice A

Having attended college for three years, I have direct experience with the effect college has on Sabbath-keeping. My college attendance has tremendously affected my desire and ability to observe the Sabbath like I should. I can honestly say that handling the issue on my own has forced me to make decisions and choices that I was not used to making. Prior to going to college, keeping the Sabbath was second nature. It was part of a family tradition that I had been accustomed to every since I could remember. My family and I would come home from work and school on Friday evenings, have dinner together at sundown, and sit and have family discussion or Bible study for the rest of the night. On Saturday mornings, we would all attend church, and relax at home until sunset. That tradition was all I knew. Naturally, sometimes my siblings and I wanted to go to Friday night dances and football games, but we understood that in our household keeping the Sabbath was not an option and we accepted the fact that we had to do as our parents instructed. All in all, we appreciated the Sabbath and understood that it was a day of rest and worship.

When I started to attend college, however, I was introduced to an environment outside of my comfort zone. I no longer had my parents to advise or reprimand me if I chose not to keep the Sabbath. Not only was I confronted with the usual societal challenges of not succumbing to the pressuring media, drugs, alcohol, and other negative worldly influences; but I was also faced with the issue of observing God's holy Sabbath as I know I should or yielding to the enticements of the world. Pressure from friends, the innate desire to be accepted, and the longing to have fun can be overwhelming. So much pressure can weigh heavily on even the most disciplined person's shoulders, however, what I came to learn was that keeping the Sabbath should not be one of those burdens. The Sabbath is a day of rest and worship, not a burden or hindrance. I cope with the pressure of peers and other influences by praying to God for strength and determination to have the desire to do what is right and have the willpower to do it. By praying and holding steadfast to my beliefs, I have managed to continue keeping the Sabbath. I also realized that surrounding myself with friends and peers who also keep the Sabbath makes keeping the Sabbath while in college easier.

In my journey towards self-discovery, I have realized that keeping the seventh day is part of who I am. Of course, there have been some instances where I have not observed the Sabbath like I should, but I have had to repent and ask God for forgiveness for those times. All in all, I have come to understand that God does not compromise in protecting and blessing me, so I should not compromise in observing His holy day.

Mandatory Essay Question

The most common argument I have encountered with in regard to my Sabbath keeping is that the seventh-day Sabbath is done away with and that it is was designed for the Israelites of the Old Covenant. It is clearly evident that the Bible's Old Testament establishes the seventh day as God's Sabbath. In Genesis 2:2-3, God blessed the Sabbath and sanctified the day. Deuteronomy goes on to explain that the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord God and that on that day, no work should be done.

The New Testament doctrine continues to support the observance of God's holy days, including the Sabbath. In Mark 2, when Jesus' Sabbath activities were questioned by the Pharisees, Christ proclaimed that He was the Lord of the Sabbath and that the Sabbath was made for man

and not man for the Sabbath. If the Sabbath was strictly for the Jews and the Old Covenant, why was Christ keeping it? The New Testament clearly establishes that the apostles kept the Sabbath (Acts 13:14) as well as the Gentiles (Acts 13:42, 18:4). What most people fail to realize is that Christ did not come to destroy the Sabbath or make it obsolete. The purpose of His coming was to **fulfill God's law spiritually and show His followers how to properly observe the Sabbath and all of God's holy days.**

Both the Old and New Testament doctrines explicitly clarify that God's followers should keep His commandments and refrain from pagan traditions. It is evident in several sources of reputable research that Sunday-observance was enforced by Emperor Constantine and has pagan origins dating back to Nimrod and his mother Semiramis. Sunday-worship derived as a day of sun worship and the worship of pagan gods. It later evolved into a day modern-day Christians have come to accept as the Lord God's day of worship. Babylonian history clearly documents the pagan origins and the Bible clearly instructs us to refrain from keeping pagan days. The Bible gives detailed instruction as to what day to keep holy and how to keep it holy. Christ was not above keeping God's seventh-day Sabbath and neither are we. It is our responsibility as God-fearing Christians to not succumb to worldly traditions that are clearly forbidden by God and realize that keeping Sunday as a day of worship is in violation of God's law and is actually not representative of worshipping Him at all, but a day of giving commemoration to pagan gods. The seventh-day Sabbath is binding in both the Old and New Covenants and should thereby be observed as God's holy day.

Catholic Bishops of the United Kingdom rate the following biblical passages as untrue, followed by several that they consider to be true.

UNTRUE

Genesis 2:21-22 — "So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept he took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man."

Genesis 3:16 — "God said to the woman [after she was beguiled by the serpent]: 'I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.'"

Matthew 27:25 — The words of the crowd: "His blood be on us and on our children."

Revelation 19:20 — "And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who in its presence had worked the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with brimstone."

TRUE

Exodus 3:14 — God reveals himself to Moses as: "I am who I am."

Leviticus 26:12 — "I will be your God, and you shall be my people."

Exodus 20:1-17 — The Ten Commandments

Matthew 5:7 — The Sermon on the Mount

Mark 8:29 — Peter declares Jesus to be the Christ

Luke 1 — The Virgin Birth

John 20:28 — Proof of bodily resurrection

Catholic Church Says Portions of the Bible Untrue

The *Times Online* reports from the U.K. that the hierarchy of the Roman Catholic Church in Britain has published a teaching document instructing Catholics that some parts of the Bible are not actually true.

The bishops warn their five million parishioners and anyone who desires to study of the Scripture, that they must not expect “total accuracy” from the Bible.

“We should not expect to find in Scripture full scientific accuracy or complete historical precision,” they say in *The Gift of Scripture*.

The document is timely, coming as it does amid the rise of the religious Right, in particular in the US.

Some Christians want a literal interpretation of the story of creation, as told in Genesis, taught alongside Darwin’s theory of evolution in schools, believing “intelligent design” to be an equally plausible theory of how the world began.

As many begin to take a serious look at teachings on Intelligent Design and challenges to Darwin’s theory, the Catholic bishops assert that the first 11 chapters of Genesis present two different and at times conflicting stories of creation, and, therefore, cannot be historical; rather, these chapters may contain “historical traces.”

The bishops caution that the Bible must be approached in the knowledge that it is “God’s word expressed in human language” and that we give proper acknowledgement both to the word of God and its “human dimensions.” They insist that the gospel must be communicated in ways “appropriate to changing times, intelligible and attractive to our contemporaries.” Although they believe that the Bible is true in passages relating to human salvation, they say, “We should not expect total accuracy from the Bible in other, secular matters.”

The bishops condemn fundamentalism for its “intransigent intolerance” and warn of “significant dangers” involved in a fundamentalist approach. “Such an approach is dangerous, for example, when people of one nation or group see in the Bible a mandate for their own superiority, and even consider themselves permitted by the Bible to use violence against others.”

In giving examples of passages that should not be taken literally, the bishops mention the early chapters of Genesis. They say that these chapters are comparable to early creation legends from other cultures, especially those from the ancient East. They contend that the main purpose of these chapters was to offer religious teaching, but that they could not be described as historical writing.

The bishops also took a jaundiced view of the prophecies of Revelation, which describe the work of the risen Jesus, the death of the Beast and the wedding feast of Christ the Lamb. In the words of the bishops: “Such symbolic language must be respected for what it is, and is not to be interpreted literally. We should not expect to discover in this book details about the end of the world, about how many will be saved and about when the end will come.”

In their foreword to the teaching document, the two most senior Catholics of the land, Cardinal Cormac Murphy-O’Connor, Archbishop of Westminster, and Cardinal Keith O’Brien, Archbishop of St Andrew’s and Edinburgh, explain its context.

The new teaching was presented as part of the 40th anniversary celebrations of *Dei Verbum*, the Second Vatican Council document which explains the place of Scripture in revelation.

In the box to the left are just a few examples of what the bishops believe are historically untrustworthy passages in the Bible, followed by several that they consider to be truthful.

What Would the Good Samaritan Do?

It's a difficult situation. You see someone obviously in need, and he asks you for money. He hasn't eaten in two days, he says. Any cash you might give him sure would help. Jesus once said, "Give to him who asks you, and from him who wants to borrow from you do not turn away" (Matthew 5:42 NKJV). Solomon wrote, "Do not say to your neighbor, 'Go, and come back, and tomorrow I will give it,' when you have it with you" (Proverbs 3:28 NKJV). You might decide to give him the cash, knowing you did your duty. If he betrays your trust by buying a bottle instead of a burger, you rationalize it will be his responsibility before God. But I bet you won't be totally comfortable about your decision, and you'll question your own wisdom.

I once heard about someone who asked the man on the corner, "How do I know if I give you this money that you won't just gamble it away?" The man replied, "Well, I already got gambling money."

This is the quandary: Do you hand cash to the man on the street corner, or do you assume a scam and walk on by? What would the Good Samaritan do?

Before answering that question, let's refer back to Proverbs 3. I quoted verse 28 above. But you can't understand verse 28 without the context of verse 27, and that earlier verse hints at what the Good Samaritan would do.

Verse 27: "Do not withhold good from those to whom it is due, when it is in the power of your hand to do it."

So let's look at what that proverb says. You should not withhold good when you have the ability to offer it. I have extra cash and somebody else has none. It's in the power of my hand to help him. Therefore I must help him, right?

Before jumping to that conclusion, look at another phrase in that proverb: "Withhold not good TO WHOM IT IS DUE." Ask yourself this: By withholding cash from someone who asks you for it, are you denying him something that is due him? The proverb gives the clear guideline that you don't owe every person a handout. If you decide to give, it would be out of generosity and not obligation. That's what "to whom it is due" means. I know that runs contrary to the culture of entitlement too often espoused these days, but it does have a ring of sense to it.

So let's bring the Good Samaritan into the picture. Many have claimed that this parable of Jesus is the best known of them all. The lesson Jesus taught penetrates our psyches precisely because we can identify with each of the characters. What would I do if I were one of the three passing by, and why would I do it? And if I were the man who legitimately needed help, would I expect a man of God to give me a few bucks?

The correct course for helping the beggar on the corner is right there in that parable. The Samaritan, once he got the man to a safe place, took out two silver coins and gave them to the innkeeper with instructions to look after the man. He did not give the cash to the man. Rather he gave it to someone whom he knew would use it wisely on the man's behalf.

Here is how that translates into modern America. If someone claims to be hungry, buy him lunch. If you want to help but can't conveniently get the guy to a restaurant, give him a gift card from Burger King where you know he can't buy booze.

Respect his dignity and offer him work in exchange for money. (I haven't yet heard of a case where the guy with the sign on the corner actually accepted the job, but I suppose it has happened a time or two.)

Search out worthy charities that are in the business of helping those in need, such as City Union Mission or the Salvation Army. They will play the part of the Samaritan's innkeeper who will take care of him, and more than that, help him address any issues that caused his condition in the first place. Their goal is to make him whole again.

The Samaritan helped the man in need, but not with cash. The innkeeper continued the Samaritan's work, but didn't place the cash in the victim's hands. Rescuing the walking wounded takes more than a few silver coins.

—Lenny Cacchio



Quiet, Personal Faith

by Brian Knowles

When you reach a certain point in your own spiritual development, you begin to take certain things as axiomatic. You realize, for example, the futility of arguing doctrine with anyone. You can't change people's basic ideas. Once they've internalized them, they're ensconced for life. The more you want someone to "see" your point of view, the less likely they are to see it.

You realize that you can't re-engineer people to conform to your own ideas of how they should be – and that includes your children, your husband, your wife or even your parents, friends and employees. We are who we are, and that's that. Apart from the work of the Holy Spirit on the inside of us, the dye is pretty much cast from an early age. Once you get to know people, they tend to act predictably.

We all tend to hunker down in comfort zones. Once there, we flood the moat, pull up the drawbridge and try to insulate ourselves from the chaos that's going on in the world around us. Change is threatening, so we resist it.

Leadership is largely about effecting behavior change. This is why we tend to find ourselves in adversarial relationships with leaders. We have to ask the question: are they operating in their interests, or ours? Who is truly looking out for us? Who cares whether we live or die?

The Ebb and Flow of Power

When someone gains power, someone else usually loses it. When the government gains power, the power of the people is reduced. In our time, governments at all levels are gaining power and we the people are losing it. The socialists on the Left want to micromanage our lives to produce an envisioned Utopia of socially engineered, easily controlled, human cattle governed by an elite that "knows best" what is good for the rest of us.

As Christians, we live in an increasingly hostile environment. Organizations like the ACLU and others are zealously working to eliminate the Christian faith from

public discourse and expression. Even the imagery of crosses on city plaques is under attack around the nation. Incrementally, we are being painted into an ever-smaller corner. One might say the "spirit of anti-Christ" is in the air.

Denominations in Chaos

Increasingly of late, I have heard Christian ministers, and ex-ministers, express growing disillusionment with "organized religion." It's too much about personalities, relentless fundraising, church politics, empire building, marketing, building programs, numbers, church government, hidebound traditions and doctrinal intransigence, they say. I tend to share their views.

I'd love to have a "church home," but I simply can't find one with which I feel even a little bit comfortable for the above-stated reasons. At the same time, I know many Christian individuals with whom I feel utterly comfortable. I know of a significant number of Christian scholars and teachers at whose feet I would gladly sit to learn. I am also greatly blessed to be a part of two large, largely Christian, families – my own, and my wife's.

I know of congregations, or study groups, to which I'd want very much to belong, but none of them is close to where I live. One is in Jerusalem, on Narkis Avenue in the Old City. Another is in Dayton, Ohio. These are rather long commutes from the Los Angeles area.

Meantime, I have a small but qualitatively rich collection of excellent study materials off which I can feed for the foreseeable future. I can live my Christian life—at least for the moment—without interference. I can serve my families, my neighbors, and anyone whom God sticks in my face to serve. There is no shortage of people who are in need of our "good works." I can freely attend any church I want to—with the exception of some of the more uptight, rigid groups—and those I wouldn't want to attend anyway.

For me, these days, this is the best way – to have a quiet, personal faith that is constantly under construction and revision as need be. Spiritually speaking, we are all “works in progress.” As Paul told the Philippians, we need to keep in mind the fact that: “...he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus” (Philippians 1:6b). Our beliefs about doctrine we can keep between ourselves and God (cf. Romans 14:22). In time, the Lord will straighten us all out on the things about which we now disagree with each other.

Most importantly, we must *live* our faith. It isn't enough to possess deeply-held beliefs. We must live them. It is how we live that is most important to God, not what we believe. Living the kind of life Jesus and the apostles taught us to live is no easy task, especially in our “post-Christian” world. It takes courage, faith and conviction. It's not for the faint-hearted.

“Out of the Box” is a regular feature of the Association for Christian Development Web site (www.godward.org). Brian Knowles is an artist and writer.

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Meet John Nesterenko, Activist for the Sabbath

John is a retiree from Cleveland, Ohio, who has been spreading the Word of the Lord since 1951. As the newspaper of his Local 1250 of the United Auto Workers Union reports: “Armed with sign boards containing scripture passages, he has walked the streets of major cities throughout the United States carrying his message. He began his mission in 1976 and has spread the word of the Gospel in cities like Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Washington, Roanoke, Boston, Detroit, Chicago, New York, and Buffalo.

“He believes in a strict religious life and his desire is to spread the teaching of the Lord to as many people as he can.

“Local 1250 remembers and wishes him well in his quest. May God bless him and keep him safe on the streets of our country.”



us into the center of His will by applying pressure. Sometimes He uses circumstances to push us in a direction that we do not want to go. We feel like we are just going in circles - and we are! It is necessary, though, if we want Him to mold us and shape us.

Once the clay is centered on the wheel, the potter uses one of his hands to invade the inside of the clay from the top of the lump. This creates what will be the opening of the vessel. With one hand on the inside and one hand on the outside, pressure is slowly but steadily applied to both the inside and the outside of the lump. All this time, the wheel continues to turn. The amount of internal and external pressure must be carefully balanced to maintain a uniform thickness so that the vessel will not crack or rip apart. As this internal and external pressure is applied, the potter is able to raise up the wall of the vessel. All this time, water must occasionally be poured on the clay to keep it wet.

Our Heavenly Potter does the same to us. After using external circumstances to get us in the center of His will, He then invades us internally from above. He puts His finger inside our soul and writes His Law on the tablets of our heart, giving us an internal desire to obey His commandments. This creates an "opening," so that our mouth can later pour out words that will bless God and bless others. The Potter keeps us going in circles as He steadily applies pressure to us both internally and externally, being careful to not let us crack up mentally or be ripped apart emotionally. Then like a potter raising up the wall of a vessel, our Potter raises us up to experience heavenly realities such as dreams, visions, prophetic words, and revelations. All this time, the Potter occasionally pours out the water of His Holy Spirit upon us to keep us wet with "the dew of Hermon" (Ps. 133:3).

After the potter has brought the vessel to the shape he desires, he carefully removes it from the wheel and puts it on a shelf to dry. The pot must stay there until it is completely dry. Sometimes we feel like the Heavenly Potter has quit working in our life and has "put us on the shelf." We feel like we are drying up spiritually. If you feel like you have been put on the shelf, don't be discouraged. Maybe the Potter just has you drying out so that you will develop a true, deep thirst for Him. A classic example of someone who spent a long time drying out on the shelf was Moses. He had to stay in the dry desert of Midian for forty years before he was ready to be used by God.

Pottery that has been dried is called greenware. We might think that the process is finished when

the Potter finally takes us off the shelf, but in reality, we are still green. Greenware has to go into the fire. "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12). Greenware is very brittle and easily broken. The fire of the kiln makes the vessel firm and solid. Without fiery trials, we have no internal strength and stability. Without the fire, we will easily crumble and fall apart in shaky situations.

After we endure some fiery trials, we are no longer green. However, the Potter is not yet finished. The final step is to apply color glazes to the vessel and put it into the kiln for one more firing. This final firing causes the glaze to stick to the surface of the pot so that the beauty and the glory of the finished glaze become a permanent part of the vessel. I like to think of this final firing as taking place on the day the Apostle Paul wrote about in 1 Corinthians 3:13-15:

"Every man's work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire."

This final firing will once and forever permanently bond to our eternal soul the glazes of God's grace which He pours upon us throughout our lifetime. And just as the final firing brings out the true colors and the shining glory which are hidden in the dull, unfired glazes, so this final firing will reveal the hidden beauty and glory which God bestows upon us by His amazing grace.

"The word which came to Jeremiah from Yahweh, saying, Arise, and go down to the potter's house, and there I will cause thee to hear my words. Then I went down to the potter's house, and, behold, he wrought a work on the wheels. And the vessel that he made of clay was marred in the hand of the potter: so he made it again another vessel, as seemed good to the potter to make it. Then the word of Yahweh came to me, saying, O house of Israel, cannot I do with you as this potter? saith Yahweh. Behold, as the clay is in the potter's hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel."
—Jeremiah 18:1-6

□

Reprinted from "Gates of Eden," September-October 2005, p. 14. "Gates of Eden" is a bimonthly newsletter produced by Gates of Eden, a Messianic Jewish ministry. Write to Gates of Eden, P.O. Box 2257, East Peoria, IL, 61611-0257.

tiate between the genetic capacity in each species' genome that permits it to change with the environment as being different from changing to some other creature. We want to provide more clarity to this inflamed issue and we ask that the evolutionists reveal what they are doggedly hiding, but they prefer to misinform the media and assassinate the character of qualified scientists who are willing to shed some light. In our **Science Curriculum Standards**, we called this micro-evolution and macro-evolution—changes within kinds and changing from one kind to another. Again, as previously stated, evolutionists want nothing to do with trying to clarify terms and meanings.

Most of the critics that send me email send four basic comments: they claim that we are sending Kansas back to the Dark Ages, or that we are making a mockery of science, or that we are morons for putting Intelligent Design into the Science Standards, or that they also are Christian and believe in evolution.

The critics claim that we have redefined science to include a backdoor to biblical creation or the supernatural.

From **Science Curriculum Standards**, page ix:

"Science is a systematic method of continuing investigation that uses observations, hypothesis testing, measurement, experimentation, logical argument and theory building to lead to more adequate explanations of natural phenomena."

Where does that say the field of science is destroyed and the back door opened to bring biblical creation into the science classroom?

Another claim that our critics promote through the media is that we are inserting Intelligent Design. Again, we go to the **Science Curriculum Standards**, Standard 3 Benchmark 3 Indicators 1-7 (pg. 75-77). This is the heart of the "evolution" area. Only 7 indicators:

- 1) understands biological evolution, descent with modification, is a scientific explanation for the history of the diversification of organisms from common ancestors.
- 2) understands populations of organisms may adapt to environmental challenges and changes as a result of natural selection, genetic drift, and various mechanisms of genetic change.
- 3) understands biological evolution is used to explain the earth's present day biodiversity: the number, variety and variability of organisms.

4) understands organisms vary widely within and between populations. Variation allows for natural selection to occur.

5) understands that the primary mechanism of evolutionary change (acting on variation) is natural selection.

6) understands biological evolution is used as a broad, unifying theoretical framework for biology.

7) explains proposed scientific explanations of the origin of life as well as scientific criticisms of those explanations.

As anyone can see, Intelligent Design is not included. But many of our critics already know this. This is not about biblical creation or Intelligent Design, it is about the last 5 words of indicator: "scientific criticisms of those explanations."

Evolutionists do not want students to know about or in any way to think about scientific criticisms of evolution. Evolutionists are the ones minimizing open scientific inquiry from their explanation of the origin of life. They do not want students to know that peer reviewed journals, articles and books have scientific criticisms of evolution.

So, instead of participating in the Science hearings before the State Board Sub-Committee and presenting testimony about evolution, they stand out in the hall and talk to the media about how the Ph.D. scientists that are presenting testimony about the criticisms "aren't really scientists," "they really don't know anything," "they obviously are in the minority and any real scientist knows there is not a controversy about evolution."

Instead of discussing the issues of evolution, noisy critics go into attack mode and do a character assassination of anyone that happens to believe that evolution should actually be subject to critical analysis.

In spite of the fact that the State Board approved **Science Curriculum Standards** that endorse critical analysis of evolution (supported by unrebutted testimony from many credentialed scientists at the Science Hearings) and does NOT include Intelligent Design, and add to that the fact that scientific polls indicate that a large percentage of parents do not want evolution taught as dogma in the science classroom, what is the response from some of the superintendents around Kansas? They seem to indicate that, "We don't care what the State Board does, and we don't care what parents want, we are going to continue teaching evolution just as we have been doing."

But, I guess we shouldn't be surprised, because superintendents and local boards of education in some districts continue to promulgate pornography

as “literature,” even though many parents have petitioned the local boards to remove the porn. Obviously that is a different issue than the Science Standards, but it still points out the lack of commitment on the part of administration in some districts to allow parents to control the education for their own children.

I have repeatedly stated this is not about biblical creation or Intelligent Design—this is about what constitutes good science standards for the students of the state of Kansas. I would encourage those who believe we are promoting a back door to creation or Intelligent Design to actually do your homework—READ and investigate the *Science Curriculum Standards* (www.ksde.org) and base your comments on them and not on the misinformation critics have been plastering the print and clogging the airways with—unless of course, your only defense really is baseless character assassination.

I have known Dr. Steve Abrams for many years. He is a fine man, a devout Christian, and works in a scientific field. I have included much of Dr. Abrams’ press release because he is dealing with issues that face our children and grandchildren on a daily basis in the government-run school system. The money you pay to government officials, whether they work for the school system or in a federal or state government office, is being used to undermine the very basis of the Christian faith — that the One True God is the Creator of all we see. Our God is a personal God who cares for us and our children. The secular gods of our age care nothing for us or the truth. Their priests live on lies to perpetuate their myths, their doctrines and dogmas. Even though there is a great deal of money that changes hands for the purpose of immortalizing the myths of evolution, money is not the only reason they are desperate to hang onto the power vested in this secular religion. At the end of the day, if the existence of a Creator God is even considered, then the secular priesthood must also consider yielding its sovereignty to the One who brought all things into existence. If the secularists are forced to concede the possibility of the existence of a Creator God, they are also compelled to consider the likelihood that such a God might expect something of them, and that they might be answerable to Him to account for their beliefs and behavior. Yes, there might really be a Judgment.

When Francis Bacon in the early 1600’s outlined what we call the “Scientific Method,” his purpose for doing so was to give mankind an orderly, logical, and rational approach with which to examine a universe that he firmly believed was created by an Almighty God who put the resources of this uni-

verse at our disposal for the purpose of doing good and honoring Him. Dr. Abrams alludes to the Scientific Method and rational scientific inquiry in his press release when he states: “Science is a systematic method of continuing investigation that uses observations, hypothesis testing, measurement, experimentation, logical argument and theory building to lead to more adequate explanations of natural phenomena.”

What we see in the shrill, hysterical blather of the secular scientific community is really not scientific at all. They do not draw our intellect to observation and reason, yet they expect us to yield to their “superior learning” as a matter of faith—with no discussion. In a very unscientific and irrational manner, they take great umbrage that we do not genuflect before them. Demanding an explanation of these priests of modern alchemy is the most scientific thing we can do. It is they who fail to examine themselves.

They expect us to embrace their words just because they are who they are, yet they give us no explanation as to why there are no intermediate species. They can offer us no place in the universe where we can observe for ourselves that evolution is occurring over here or over there. The processes of “evolution” are neither repeatable nor observable, but they want us to accept them as truth based on blind faith. And why does their theory of evolution defy the second law of thermodynamics? Evolution presupposes that nature is evolving to a more usable form, but nothing else in the universe does.

Whether biochemist Michael Behe’s contention that there is an irreducible complexity in nature which the theory of evolution cannot explain (hence Intelligent Design) is a good scientific explanation for the existence of life, one thing is certain. Secular evolutionists cannot conjure up a cogent explanation by their stubborn (and unworkable) reliance on matter plus time plus chance. This does not work statistically, nor does it obey known laws of science. The scam in all this is that these white-robed priests of the order of Evolution 101 insist that we call their superstition and sham theory science.

What continues to baffle me is that many Christians are ambivalent at best and uninterested at worst about a form of thinking that is cutting the legs out from under them and their faith. They support it with their tax dollars and dare not lift a finger to protest this fraud. My question to these apathetic Christians is, how many of our children will this hocus pocus pseudo-science destroy for eternity before you show any concern?

—Kenneth Ryland

Executed for Distributing Bibles



When 34-year old Jiang Zongxiu went to her neighboring market last June in Guizhou Province, China, along with her mother-in-law, Jiang went to the marketplace taking the opportunity to hand out Bibles and Christian literature and tell people about Jesus. Only this day they had an encounter with the Chinese police.

The two Christian women were handcuffed together and brought to the police station. They were interrogated throughout the evening of the 17th. The next morning they were sentenced by the Public Security Bureau (PSB) to 15 days incarceration for “suspected spreading of rumor and disturbing the social order.”

Jiang and her mother-in-law knew the risk of spreading Christian literature in communist China. Both had been active in their church for more than 10 years and dared to go forth. Even when they were arrested, interrogated and sentenced to serve 15 days, they were willing to accept the consequences of their actions—all from a government that claims to have “freedom of religion.”

But it was not enough for the PSB to arrest and beat these two Christian women for the crime of passing out Christian literature. In the afternoon of June 18th, Mrs. Jiang Zongziu was pronounced dead by the PSB office of Tongzi County. They claimed she died of “natural causes.” The fact is she was beaten to death.

Voice of the Martyrs has received video testimony from the surviving family, photos of Jiang’s body showing her bruised body, and a copy of the actual arrest document. All of this had to be smuggled out of China as the authorities continue to attempt to hide their systematic persecution of Christians. An international campaign is now under way on behalf of the surviving family.

(Source: Voice of the Martyrs)

Hindu Extremists Claim Indian Pastor’s House

NEW DELHI, December 14 (Compass Direct) — Pastor Feroz Masih of the Believers’ Church in India (BCI), who had earlier received death and arson threats, was forced to vacate his house in the Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh, India, on December 7.

“The administration of Baijnath town had served us an eviction notice, and members of the Vishwa Hindu Parishad [VHP or World Hindu Council] also installed a Hindu idol on the verandah of our house,” Ramesh Masih, the pastor’s son, told Compass.

The VHP had earlier assaulted Masih and told him and about 60 members of the BCI that if they did not “re-convert” to Hinduism in a ceremony scheduled for November 20, they would be burned alive and their houses destroyed.

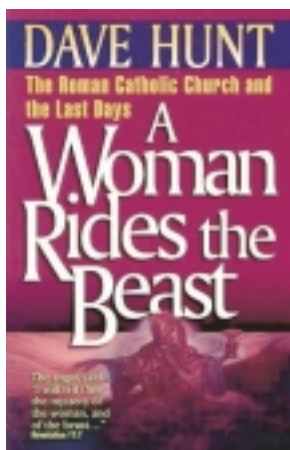
Police stepped in and prevented any physical harm to the believers and their homes.

Local authorities then served an eviction notice on the Masih family on November 30. When Masih pleaded for more time, the eviction date was extended to December 16.

The Masih family could have fought to stay in their home, but they were intimidated by the VHP.

Because of this intimidation, Masih’s family was forced to vacate the house even before December 16, he said. “Otherwise,” he said, “we could have taken a stay order from the court, asking the administration to arrange for alternative housing, since we have documented evidence that we have been living in the house for more than 20 years.”

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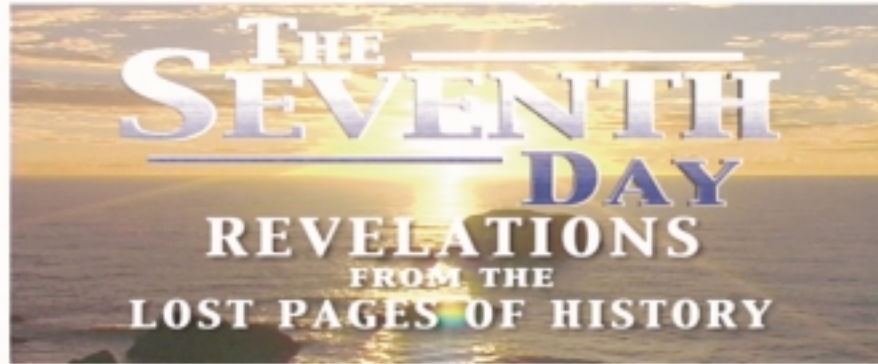
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