

The Sabbath Sentinel

November–December 2007



In stormy seas our Captain says,
"Trust your charts and stay the course."

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

Jesus said, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath"

The Sabbath Sentinel

November-December 2007 Volume 58, No. 6 Issue 528

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Our Cover: *Jesus, who calmed the sea, is the Captain of our salvation (Mark 4:35-41, Hebrews 2:10).*
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Christianity — Code Blue

Our theme for this year has been “Returning to Righteousness.” Over the course of the year we have made an effort to publish articles that would help you improve your walk with Christ and aid you in defending your Christian faith and in strengthening your commitment to live by “the whole counsel of God,” including the Sabbath.

There was one primary reason for declaring this to be our theme for the year: the deteriorating state of Christianity in the United States and other Western democratic nations whose political foundations were laid in the fertile soil of the Protestant Reformation. Political freedom exists where men and women have some sense of individual responsibility to live in a way that pleases their Creator. We have lost the ability to feel shame and guilt, feelings of conscience that drive us mortals to our knees before a merciful God. What is most distressing is that our Christian youth, in their desire to fit into our sex-crazed, secular culture, are also losing those qualities necessary for repentance and righteousness.

I used the term “code blue” in the title because it best illustrates the current state of Western Christianity: “*code blue n.* A medical emergency in which a team of medical personnel work to revive an individual in cardiac arrest.” The heart is weak and the whole body is sick. The only hope for regaining our strength is to regain our righteousness. We are failing because our loyalties are divided. We are trying to serve two masters — mammon and Christ, and our strength and effectiveness in influencing the culture for good are failing because of it. We are set upon by doubters, atheists, and humanists, and we seem unable to fend them off.

Jesus declared: “And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force” (Matthew 11:12). Do we have the passion and single-minded commitment to take hold of the Kingdom and fight for it the same way that Jacob grabbed a hold of the Lord and refused to let go until the Lord blessed him? If we had that kind of godly fervor, we would not see the flower of Christ withering in our land.

This past weekend my wife and I attended a “Worldview Weekend.” This is a program dedicated to the defense of the Christian faith in an increasingly secular culture. High-profile Christian leaders such as David Barton of Wall Builders and Ken Hamm of Answers in Genesis are always featured as part of the program. What made this Worldview Weekend unique was its title, “Code Blue Rally.” It was called “Code Blue” because of the desperate state of Christianity in the United States. Young people are leaving the churches so fast that this nation will look like England or France in another decade. The purpose of the rallies is to stem the tide of the collapsing church and bring young people back to the faith.

Here are the facts about American Christianity that have many people alarmed (excerpted from the Website of codebluerally.com):

Adults and Students at Risk:

Researchers continue to come up with increasingly grave statistics that explain how serious the condition is. Among Christian adults:

- 64% believe moral truth depends on the situation;
- 60% believe male/female co-habitation outside of marriage is acceptable;
- 55% believe a good person can earn his or her salvation;
- 44% believe Jesus Christ committed sins while on earth (Barna research).

And consider the peril of college students:

- 67% of college professors approve of homosexuality;
- 84% of professors approve of abortion;
- 65% embrace socialist and communist ideals (survey by Lichter and Rothman);
- 88% of students from “Christian” homes deny their faith before they graduate from college;

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The Prophecy Pit

by *Kenneth Westby*



Speaking of “the end” and his Second Coming, Jesus said, “No one knows about that day or hour...,” yet his warning has not dampened thousands of prophecy buffs who claim they do know. For over two thousand years there has not been a single generation void of predictors calling for “the end” and weaving elaborate scenarios full of numbers, scriptures, historical dates and current events to support their claims. Their accumulated predictions, however, resemble a junkyard full of old rusting, crashed and mashed cars. How could so many sincere believers get it so wrong? Is there something about the nature of biblical prophecy they didn’t understand? Prophetic preachers fill the airwaves and their books crowd the shelves of Christian bookstores, yet they persist in following the same failed approach toward understanding biblical prophecy.

October 23, 1844

“This was to have been the first day in heaven. Instead, the Advent believers found themselves still chained to earth, reeling in shock and grief—the laughingstock of a jeering world. The Bible, they were utterly certain, had said Jesus would return on October 22. He hadn’t.”¹

This event was called “The Great Disappointment” and marked the collapse of William Miller’s (1782-1849) dynamic advent movement. Miller had studied the Bible and calculated its codes and concluded that the second coming would occur in the twelve months following March 1843, then shifting the fateful date to October 22, 1844.

Tens of thousands of Christians withdrew from their churches to await the predicted Advent. Many abandoned homes, crops, animals, gave away their money, and closed their stores (one sign read, “This shop is closed in honor of the King of kings who will appear about the 20th of October”), and were bitterly disappointed. “We wept and wept,” remembered one of them, “till the day dawn.” The Seventh-day Adventist church was one of six organizations that grew from what remained of Miller’s shattered movement.

Although Miller’s failed prophecy is one of the best known modern examples of gambling and losing by date-picking, he is just one of many hundreds of leaders over centuries whose prophecies ended up in the pit.

I’ve been a serious student of prophecy for almost fifty years and I’ve seen predictions made and predictions fail...including some of my own. Early on I believed we could know the actual date the great tribu-

lation would begin (1972) and when Christ would return (1975). I was dead wrong as were other sincere folk following equally sincere but misguided leaders.

My epiphany arrived about forty years ago. I realized there was more to prophecy than interpreting symbols, playing with numbers, looking at current events and coming up with a scenario. Since that epiphany I have continued studying prophecy seeking to comprehend it and learn why I and others so easily stumble in our understanding of biblical prophecy.

It was some consolation to learn that my errors in prophetic understanding were more common than rare. Fiascos like that of William Miller’s Advent movement litter church history like leaves in a fall windstorm. We will illustrate a few other examples of missed dates and prophecies prior to Miller’s blunder. An exhaustive listing of failed predictions would require several books.

When Is The End?

There was a continual parade of would-be-Christ and apocalyptic movements in the centuries preceding the birth of Jesus. The New Testament mentions some of these and history completes the picture. In the first century A.D. especially, there was great expectation of prophetic fulfillment and Jesus became the focus of much of it.

The apostles were caught up in the expectation that the Messianic Age would dawn in their lifetimes and Jesus didn’t do much to discourage them. When pressed for specific times, however, he gave parables

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The Atheist Indoctrination Project

by Dinesh D'Souza

It seems atheists have developed a comprehensive strategy to win the minds of the next generation. The strategy can be described simply: let the religious people breed them, and we will educate them to despise their parents' beliefs. Many people think that the secularization of the minds of our young people is the inevitable consequence of learning and maturing. In fact, it is to a large degree orchestrated by teachers and professors to promote anti-religious agendas.

Consider a timely example. In recent years some parents and school boards have asked that public schools teach alternatives to Darwinian evolution. These efforts sparked a powerful outcry from the scientific and non-believing community. Defenders of evolution accuse parents and school boards of retarding the acquisition of scientific knowledge in the name of religion. *The Economist* editorialized that "Darwinism has enemies mostly because it is not compatible with a literal interpretation of the book of Genesis."

This is indeed so, but doesn't Darwinism have friends and supporters mostly for the same reason? Consider the alternative: the Darwinists are merely standing up for science. But surveys show that the vast majority of young people in America today are scientifically illiterate, widely ignorant of all aspects of science. How many high school graduates could tell you the meaning of Einstein's famous equation? Lots of young people don't have a clue about photosynthesis or Boyle's Law. So why isn't there a political movement to fight for the teaching of photosynthesis? Why isn't the ACLU filing lawsuits on behalf of Boyle's Law?

The answer is clear. For the defenders of Darwinism, no less than for its critics, religion is the issue. Just as some people oppose the theory of evolution because they believe it to be anti-religious, many others support it for the very same reason. This is why we have Darwinism but not Keplerism; we encounter Darwinists but no one describes himself as an Einsteinian. Darwinism has become an ideology.

The well-organized movement to promote Darwinism and exclude alternatives is part of a larger educational project in today's public schools. I'll let the champions of this project describe it in their own words. "Faith is one of the world's great evils, comparable to the smallpox virus but harder to eradicate,"

writes Richard Dawkins, author of *The God Delusion*. "Religion is capable of driving people to such dangerous folly that faith seems to me to qualify as a kind of mental illness."

Christopher Hitchens, author of *God Is Not Great*, writes, "How can we ever know how many children had their psychological and physical lives irreparably maimed by the compulsory inculcation of faith?" Religion, he charges, has "always hoped to practice upon the unformed and undefended minds of the young." He wistfully concludes, "If religious instruction were not allowed until the child had attained the age of reason, we would be living in a quite different world."

If religion is so bad, what should be done about it? It should be eradicated. According to Sam Harris, author of *The End of Faith*, belief in Christianity is like belief in slavery. "I would be the first to admit that the prospects for eradicating religion in our time do not seem good. Still the same could have been said about efforts to abolish slavery at the end of the eighteenth century."

But how should religion be eliminated? Our atheist educators have a short answer: through the power of science. "I personally feel that the teaching of modern science is corrosive of religious belief, and I'm all for that," says physicist Steven Weinberg. If scientists can destroy the influence of religion on young people, "then I think it may be the most important contribution that we can make."

One way in which science can undermine the plausibility of religion, according to biologist E.O. Wilson, is by showing that the mind itself is the product of evolution and that free moral choice is an illusion. "If religion...can be systematically analyzed and explained as a product of the brain's evolution, its power as an external source of morality will be gone forever."

By abolishing all transcendent or supernatural truths, science can establish itself as the only source of truth, our only access to reality. The objective of science education, according to biologist Richard Lewontin, "is not to provide the public with knowledge of how far it is to the nearest star and what genes are made of." Rather, "the problem is to get them to reject irrational and supernatural explanations of the

world, the demons that exist only in their imaginations, and to accept a social and intellectual apparatus, science, as the only begetter of truth."

What, then, happens to religion? Philosopher Daniel Dennett suggests that "our religious traditions should certainly be preserved, as should the languages, the art, the costumes, the rituals, the monuments. Zoos are now more or less seen as second class havens for endangered species, but at least they are havens, and what they preserve is irreplaceable."

How is all this to be achieved? The answer is simple: through indoctrination in the schools. In his book *Breaking the Spell*, Dennett urges that schools teach religion as a purely natural phenomenon. By this he means that religion should be taught as if it were untrue. Dennett argues that religion is like sports or cancer, "a human phenomenon composed of events, organisms, objects, structures, patterns." By studying religion on the premise that there is no supernatural truth underlying it, Dennett argues that young people will come to accept religion as a social creation pointing to nothing higher than human hopes and aspirations.

As for atheism, Sam Harris argues that it should be taught as a mere extension of science and logic. "Atheism is not a philosophy. It is not even a view of the world. It is simply an admission of the obvious....Atheism is nothing more than the noises reasonable people make in the presence of unjustified religious beliefs."

Of course, parents—especially Christian parents—might want to say something about all this. That's why the atheist educators are now raising the question of whether parents should have control over what their children learn. Dawkins asks, "How much do we regard children as being the property of their parents? It's one thing to say people should be free to believe whatever they like, but should they be free to impose their beliefs on their children? Is there something to be said for society stepping in? What about bringing up children to believe manifest falsehoods? Isn't it always a form of child abuse to label children as possessors of beliefs that they are too young to have thought out?"

Dennett remarks that "some children are raised in such an ideological prison that they willingly become their own jailers...forbidding themselves any contact with the liberating ideas that might well change their minds." The fault, he adds, lies with the parents who raised them. "Parents don't literally own their children the way slave owners once owned slaves, but are, rather, their stewards and guardians and ought to be held accountable by outsiders for their guardianship, which does imply that outsiders have a right to interfere."

Psychologist Nicholas Humphrey argued in a recent lecture that just as Amnesty International works to

liberate political prisoners around the world, secular teachers and professors should work to free children from the damaging influence of their parents' religious instruction. "Parents have no god-given license to enculturate their children in whatever ways they personally choose: no right to limit the horizons of their children's knowledge, to bring them up in an atmosphere of dogma and superstition, or to insist they follow the straight and narrow paths of their own faith."

Philosopher Richard Rorty argued that secular professors in the universities ought "to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own." Rorty noted that students are fortunate to find themselves under the control "of people like me, and to have escaped the grip of their frightening, vicious, dangerous parents." Indeed, parents who send their children to college should recognize that as professors "we are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable."

This is how many secular teachers treat the traditional beliefs of students. The strategy is not to argue with religious views or to prove them wrong. Rather, it is to subject them to such scorn that they are pushed outside the bounds of acceptable debate. This strategy is effective because young people who go to good colleges are extremely eager to learn what it means to be an educated Harvard man or Stanford woman. Consequently their teachers can very easily steer them to think a certain way merely by making that point of view seem fashionable and enlightened. Similarly, teachers can pressure students to abandon what their parents taught them simply by labeling those positions as simplistic and unsophisticated.

Children spend the majority of their waking hours in school. Parents invest a good portion of their life savings in college education and entrust their offspring to people who are supposed to educate them. Isn't it wonderful that educators have figured out a way to make parents the instruments of their own undoing? Isn't it brilliant that they have persuaded Christian moms and dads to finance the destruction of their own beliefs and values? Who said atheists aren't clever?

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This article is adapted from the author's book *What's So Great About Christianity*, published by Regnery. Find out more at <http://dineshdsouza.com>.

Destined for Stardom

by Daniel Botkin



I don't know about you, but I want to be a star. Not a rock star, not a movie star, not a football star, but a star like the ones mentioned by the Prophet Daniel: "And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever" (Dan. 12:3).

The Apostle Paul elaborated on this concept of the stardom of the saints when he wrote, "One star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. 15:41f). When Daniel and Paul likened the saints to stars, it was in the context of the future resurrection in the age to come. However, even now in this present age, we are supposed to shine like stars in this spiritually dark world. We should stand out like bright stars against the blackness of the night, according to the Scriptures: "Do all things without murmurings and disputings, that ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world" (Philippians 2:14).

Shining like stars is conditional. To shine brightly, we have to be "blameless and harmless" and "without rebuke." We have to "do all things without murmurings and disputings." If, as Paul states, the absence of murmurings, disputings, blame, harm, and rebuke makes us shine, then we can conclude that the presence of murmurings, disputings, blame, harm, and rebuke will surely make us shine less brightly. Like dark soot on the glass chimney of an oil lamp, these flaws block out the light from the fire that burns in our heart. It doesn't matter how much fire and zeal you have in your heart if the dirty soot is blocking the light. You are only generating heat, and radiating very little light. A star is not going to shine very brightly if it lets itself be defiled by the darkness and gloom around it.

It was a star that led the wise men to the Messiah. "Where is He that is born King of the Jews?" they inquired. "For we have seen His star in the East, and are come to worship Him" (Matt. 2:2).

The wise men were directed to Bethlehem, and as they went, "lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy" (Matt. 2:9).



We are like that Star of Bethlehem. We appear in this dark world for a short time, for only one generation. We shine so that wise men who are seeking the King of the Jews will know where and how to find Him. Wise men still seek Him, as a Christian bumper sticker proclaimed. Like the Star of Bethlehem, we point seekers to Yeshua, and they rejoice with exceeding great joy.

"And when they were come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother, and fell down and worshipped Him. And when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto Him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh" (Matt. 2:11).

They rejoiced with exceeding great joy when they saw the star, but they did not worship the star. Nor did they worship Mary. They worshipped Him. The star was forgotten. The surpassing glory of the newly-found King outshined the glory of the star. We should be like that star - eager to point seekers to Yeshua so that they can rejoice, worship Him, and present Him with gifts. Then we should be willing to be forgotten after our job is done, just like that star was forgotten.

John the Baptist was a man who was willing to be outshined and forgotten. Some of John's disciples were concerned when several of John's followers

started leaving him and following after Yeshua. John didn't mind, though, because he understood that his purpose was to point people to the Messiah. "He that hath the bride is the Bridegroom," he said. "But the friend of the Bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the Bridegroom's voice: this my joy therefore is fulfilled. He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:29). Yeshua said of John, "He was a burning and a shining light" (John 5:35). John shined so brightly because he was willing to be outshined by Yeshua and then forgotten.

"Ye are the light of the world," Yeshua tells us. "A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle, and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick; and it giveth light unto all that are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matt. 5:14-16).

A man does not light a candle to set it under a bushel, and God did not create stars to put them under the crust of the earth. He created the stars and set them in the firmament to shine and to give light and direction. In the above passage, the phrases "on a hill" and "on a candlestick" and "that they may see" all suggest prominence, not obscurity. You may be obscure in a global sense. You may not be world-famous or nationally-famous. You may not even be very well-known in your local community. Yet within your sphere of influence, among those who do know you, you should be prominent: set on a hill, set on a candlestick, so that men may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven.

Stars stand out against the black night sky. The darker the night, the brighter the stars shine. And as Paul said, "one star differeth from another star in glory." How brightly you shine is determined by you. How much weight are you willing to bear in your service to the Lord and to His people? That will give you some indication of the weight of glory that you will bear.

Stars differ not only in the amount of glory, but also in the sort of glory that they bear. We are each suited and wired by our Maker to excel and shine in different ways. Some are destined to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, or teachers. Others shine as musicians and worship leaders. Some are called and equipped to be generous philanthropists who cheerfully give millions of dollars for the work of the Lord. (We're still waiting for one of those to join our local congregation!)

Most people are called to be common working people — just ordinary people who do extraordinary things by faith. A common working man can be a shining example no matter what kind of job he has. Years ago someone said something like this: "If you are called to be 'just a street sweeper,' there's no shame in

that. If you are called to be a street sweeper, then be the best street sweeper you can possibly be." I agree, and I would add this: Remember that "Street" and "Saint" have the same abbreviation, namely "St." So a street sweeper can be a saint. And if you are "just a bus driver," excel at driving. And remember that at the Post Office, "Drive" and "Doctor" have the same abbreviation, namely "Dr." So if you excel as a driver, you can shine as brightly as a doctor.

In the shallow world of celebrities and sports heroes, only a very small percentage of people ever achieve stardom. And those who do become stars only shine for a brief season. In God's Kingdom, we are all destined for stardom, and we will shine forever and ever. That should encourage us when we are depressed. Old Abram was depressed about being childless one gloomy night. Yahweh told him to look up at the stars. "So shall thy seed be," He told Abram.

If you belong to the Messiah, you are destined for stardom as a descendant of Abraham, because "if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29). You are called to stardom, so be a shining example in everything you do.

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ACLU and Christians

Can persecuted Christians expect help from the ACLU?

Reflecting on his early years as the ACLU's founder and executive director, Roger Baldwin candidly revealed his original motives and objectives:

"I am for socialism, disarmament, and ultimately, for abolishing the state itself as an instrument of violence and compulsion. I seek social ownership of property, the abolition of the properties class, and sole control of those who produce wealth. Communism is the goal. It all sums up into one single purpose — the abolition of dog-eat-dog under which we live. I don't regret being part of the communist tactic. I knew what I was doing. I was not an innocent liberal. I wanted what the communists wanted and I traveled the United Front road to get it."

Ashes and Bones

by Brian Knowles



Over the course of the past few weeks, we've lost two family members: Chuck Hayes and Janet Oswald. Chuck was the father of our daughter-in-law, Kathy Rapp. Janet was the aunt of our son-in-law, Fred Schneider.

Both Chuck and Janet were Christians in their own way. The former was a member of the United Church of God and the latter a Christian Scientist. Chuck died of cancer, Janet died of unknown natural causes, alone in an upstairs room of her apartment.

Both had completed the course of their life. Now they rest in the Lord. Both are gone from this earth. They left behind only ashes and bones. In the end, this is all any of us leaves behind, except for memories, and those grow dim in the living with time.

The void we leave cannot be filled by others because each of us is truly unique. There will never be another "Planet Janet," as I used to call her, nor another Chuck Hayes. Part of their legacy was their uniqueness.

In the span of time and space, none of us is truly important. Each of us is a mere speck of life, here for a moment, gone in a cosmic instant. Because we are acutely self-conscious while we live, we are important to ourselves. Because we are connected by genes, blood or marriage to others, we are important to them. Because we contribute something to the lives of still others, we have value and meaning to them. Ultimately, our circle of significance is small and transient. In a relatively short time, the whole circle will disappear to be replaced by others who have morphed into the space we once occupied. Life makes its entrances onto the stage, does its dance, and then exits into eternity to the applause of almost no one.

We who survive are left only with memories of the deceased. We honor the dead by remembering them, telling stories and anecdotes about them, and praising them for their good qualities. We trust God with their eternities. What other choice do we have? We believe that our Lord had some purpose in giving them their lives, as he does in our own. We are confident that we will see our loved ones again, and that their present state is a good one.

On some peculiar abstract plane, we argue pop theology among ourselves. We speculate about the possible immortality of the soul, about "soul sleep" and resurrections, about heaven, hell and purgatory. We talk among ourselves about a "second death," and ask "what happens to those who have never heard the Gospel?"

We take some passages of Scripture literally and others allegorically. When it comes to the afterlife, we tend to cherry pick our passages. The unpleasant ones we reason around or ignore; the pleasant ones we embrace. We reason about what a "loving God must be like" and about what he could not possibly be like. In short, we tend to anthropomorphize our Creator in order to render him acceptable to our vulnerable, human sensitivities.

The fact is, we don't know a lot about God, spirit or the afterlife. We know mainly what our prophets have told us, and some of them may turn out to have been false. We also know what Jesus and his apostles have told us, and in those words we trust.

When someone we know dies, we are brought up short. We link their deaths to our own mortality. We reflexively gauge our own position on the conveyor belt of life. We think, "Someday I'll be the one in the coffin." We don't know how death will come to us, but we hope that it is as painless as possible. For many, it is anything but painless. It is horrific and terrible. For some it is long and lingering and unspeakably painful. We may find that we pass from this life into the next in a morphine-induced stupor, in some impersonal hospice, only vaguely aware of what is happening to us, as did my beloved aunt of blessed memory.

We could find ourselves in the path of a rampaging tornado, as did the Woodburys who died recently in Oklahoma. Others may join the thousands of victims of terrorist bombs, murderous militias, famine, disease or civil war. Death of one kind or another is a daily fact of life. It is, as Paul put it, "the last enemy."

It is not morbid to think about these things. It is entirely appropriate. Note the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:2-4, "It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for

death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure."

The death of others confronts us with our own mortality. The experience sobers us up to the realities of life. We're here today, gone tomorrow. Over and over again, passages of Scripture remind us of this:

"For he knows that is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow. Who can tell him what will be under the sun after he is gone?" Ecclesiastes 8:12.

"But the one who is rich should take pride in his low position, because he will pass away like a wild flower. For the sun rises with scorching heat and withers the plant; its blossom falls and its beauty is destroyed. In the same way, the rich man will fade away even while he goes about his business," (James 1:10-11).

"Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes," (James 4:14).

"Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure," (Job 14:1-2).

Many other passages allude to the brevity and transience of life. If you've lived any length of time at all, you are painfully aware of the passing of people who were dear and important to you. Some of them were larger-than-life types who seemed gifted with incredible life force. How could they ever die? They were so full of life and energy! Yet they are gone. Even mighty Moses was taken at the peak of his powers (Deuteronomy 34:7). Israel's greatest king, David, lived only 70 years, yet Scripture says of him, "He died at a good old age, having enjoyed a long life, wealth and honor..." (1 Chronicles 29:27). By David's time, a mere 70 years was viewed as a "long life"!

The last words of David provide wisdom for us all:

"The Spirit of the Lord spoke through me; his word was on my tongue. The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: 'When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning, like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth.'

"Is not my house right with God? Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant; arranged and secured in every part? Will he not

bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire?

"But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand. Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie," (II Samuel 23:2-7).

Ask yourself this: Have my words been anointed with God's Spirit? If I have had the opportunity to speak, write or teach: have I sought the leading of God for those words? Have I taught my children well the way of God? James wrote, "...no man can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison," (James 3:8). We have all said words we have later regretted. Sometimes our words have produced bitter fruit in those who heard them. Often, we have lashed out without thinking. All too often we open our mouths only long enough to change feet. When it comes to words, we all have much of which to repent.

David used his royal authority in conscience toward God. I believe that one of the most important lessons of life is to be found in the issue of authority. We have all had authority, or power, of one kind or another. That authority may have been over lesser living creatures such as pets or animals; authority over children; authority over employees or parishioners; authority over budgets, equipment and other resources. In the real world, the strong have power over the weak. For the wicked, "weakness is a provocation." It is a signal to them to fill the power vacuum, to hurt, to conquer. For the righteous, the weakness of others is an opportunity to serve, to strengthen, to protect, to help, to rescue or to heal. Paul wrote: "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself..." (Romans 15:1-3a).

We are not here strictly for ourselves, but for others. We are here to do good and to leave our part of the world a little better than we found it if at all possible. If we can strengthen the weak, help the helpless, and learn to forgive, forget and move on, we'll have accomplished something of value with our brief sojourn on Planet Earth. The world we live in is full of evil and its fruits. There is much damage to be repaired, sickness to be healed and wounds to be bound up. There is plenty of room for godly people to seek to offset at least some of the evil, cruelty and destruction that fills the modern world.

If we can point anyone toward God, we have done something in the interests of the kingdom. If we can extend the hand of mercy, we will have fulfilled Jesus' beatitude: "Blessed are the merciful, for they will be

shown mercy," (Matthew 5:7). I don't know about you, but I could use all of the mercy God is willing to extend me. In order to receive it, I must be willing to extend it to those for whom it is appropriate.

For a true Christian, life is about being good, doing good, keeping clean, and learning to acquire the attributes of God. It is about walking daily in the power and leading of the Holy Spirit, and producing its fruit in our lives (James 1:27 & Galatians 5:22-26). The works of the flesh (Galatians 3:19 ff.) should be falling away, like the jettisoned pieces of a spent three-stage rocket as we ascend Godward in our conduct. As Paul writes, "You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness," (Ephesians 4:22-24).

The way of life we once "enjoyed" was actually a way of death. What we once thought of as "cool," "hip," and fun can now be viewed through the eyes of the Spirit. Hatred, rage, fighting and hostility ought to be a thing of the past. Paul continues, "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave us," (Ephesians 4:31-32).

It may be tough, but we're here to learn to love unlovable people, to meet others at their points of real need, not with mere platitudes and well-wishing, but with actual help that provides for that need (Matthew 7:10). It is the need, not the other person's loveability that dictates our action toward them. When people are most needy, they are not generally at their best. Was the man the Samaritan helped at his best lying bloody, filthy, naked and broke in a ditch at the side of a Roman road (Luke 10:30)? Of course not.

Are the widows and orphans who are "in their distress" at their best? Not necessarily. They may be angry, discouraged, hateful, or even suicidal over their plight. Yet they need help and they need it now. The help they need may be financial. It may be nothing more than simple support and encouragement. It may involve auto repair, fixing a malfunctioning toilet or sink, or providing them with food. The point is, all of us experience the presence of needy people in our lives. They are forever in our faces. Often, like the priest and the Levite, we "walk by on the other side" turning a blind eye to their plight. Yet, being a Good Samaritan can be a high-risk behavior. Wisdom is required. Ask God for guidance before helping someone who appears to need it. Listen to the voice of the Spirit. A small, well-intentioned woman should not attempt to assist a large, aggressive male drunk! You get the picture.

Life is too short to live it merely to accumulate material things, or to provide oneself with pleasures. Solomon tried that and discovered that it was an empty way of life. There is no real satisfaction in materialism. Jesus warned, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions," (Luke 12:15).

As Christians, we are bought with a price. That means we are here to serve the interests of Christ and the kingdom of God, not our own interests. We are salt and light in a pitch black world. There's work to do. Before long, there'll be nothing left of us but ashes and bones, and a legacy of...what? Good works? Works of the flesh? A squandered life lived in the service of the self? What? Now is the time to decide.

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The Blessing of the Seventh Day

The blessing and hallowing of the seventh day at creation further reveals that God intended the Sabbath to have on-going benefits for the human family. It would make no sense for God to bless and sanctify a unit of holy time for Himself. The blessings of God are outgoing, benefiting His creatures. They represent not wishful thinking but assurance of fruitfulness, prosperity, and abundant life. For example, God blessed the first couple saying, "Be fruitful and multiply" (Gen. 1:28; cf. 9:1; 49:22-26). Similarly, we read in the Aaronic benediction: "The Lord bless you and keep you" (Num. 6:24). The blessing of God results, then, in the preservation and assurance of abundant life. This meaning is expressed explicitly by the Psalmist when he writes: "The Lord has commanded the blessing, life for evermore" (Ps. 133:3). Applied to the Sabbath, this means that God made this day a channel through which human life can receive His beneficial and vitalizing power.

The Sabbath under Crossfire by Samuele Bacchiocchi, pp. 84-85.

Christianity Gave Women Freedom and Dignity

By Alvin J. Schmidt, Ph.D

HOLLYWOOD, CA (ANS) -- What would be the status of women be in the Western world today had God not entered the world in the flesh of his Son Jesus Christ? One way to answer this question is to look at the low status women still have in Islamic countries. In Saudi Arabia, for instance, women are not even permitted to drive automobiles, and in the Koran a man is commanded to beat his wives physically if they are disobedient (Sura 4:34).

When one looks back in history before and at the time of Christ, women, similar to Islamic countries today, also had very little freedom and dignity. They were seen as evil, inferior, unclean, unequal, and kept silent. Numerous statements in ancient literature attest to this biased cultural perception. I shall cite only a few examples.

- Women as Evil

Reflecting Greek culture, Homer (eighth century B.C.) wrote, "One cannot trust women" (The Odyssey). The Greek playwright Euripides (d. 406 B.C.) said, "Women were the best devisers of evil" (Medea). Tacitus the first-century Roman pictured women as dominating and cruel (Annals). Among the Hebrews, Jesus son of Sirach (second century B.C.) stated, "From a woman sin had its beginning and because of her we all die" (Ecclesiastus).

- Women as Inferior

The Greek physician Hippocrates (d. 377 B.C.) argued, "The female is less perfect than the male." Aristotle (d. 322 B.C.) the philosopher asserted, "The female is as it were a deformed male" (Generation of Animals). Because woman was seen as inferior Roman culture placed her under the law of patria potestas and manus, which gave man total control over his daughters and wife. During the rabbinic or oral law era (ca. 400 B.C. – c.a. 200 A.D.), the Hebrew wife was obligated to wash her husband's face, hands, and feet (Kethuboth). A Hebrew prayer declared, "Blessed [art Thou] who did not make me a woman" (Menahot).

- Women as Unclean

The belief that women are unclean was present in virtually all cultures; for instance, among the Hindus of India, the Caribs of British Guiana, many North American Indian tribes, Eskimos, and others. And it was also a common perception among the Greco-Romans and the Hebrews. Women's perceived uncleanness was the result of their monthly menses,

which led to their being deprived of many freedoms and privileges. The Hebrew Talmud, for instance, has an entire book titled Niddah that largely deals with women's menstrual uncleanness.

- Women as Unequal

Compared to men, ancient cultures gave very unequal treatment to women. Married men were commonly permitted to have extra-marital-sexual relations, but not so for married women. This double standard was lamented by a Greek wife in one of Euripides' plays. She said, "If a man grows tired of the company at home, he can go out and find a cure for tediousness. We wives are forced to look to one man only" (Medea). The Roman law Lex Julia issued by Caesar Augustus (d. A.D. 14) stated that a wife had no right to bring charges against her husband when he committed adultery. However, a wife who committed adultery was punished under patria potestas, often resulting in her execution. Similarly, among the Hebrews adultery was defined in terms of woman's marital status, not a man's.

Women's unequal treatment was also evident in not having the right to speak in public. The rabbinic oral said it was "shameful" to hear a woman's voice in public (Berakhoth). Homer had Telemachus rebuke his mother Penelope for speaking in public. He told her, "speech is only for men" (The Odyssey). The Greek playwright Sophocles (d. 406 B.C.) wrote, "O woman, silence is an adornment to women" (Ajax). In 215 B.C. the Roman men were upset when women gathered in the Roman Forum to ask that the Oppian Law be repealed. In response, Cato said, "Could you not have asked your husbands the same thing at home?" (Livy, The Founding of the City).

- Jesus Gave Dignity and Freedom to Women

One could cite many more examples of how women in the ancient world were denied freedom and dignity. This was the world that Jesus entered. And how did he respond? His interaction with women shows he rejected the ancient-prejudicial beliefs regarding women.

When a woman with an issue of blood touched his garment, he was not shocked; nor did think he had now become unclean. Instead, he told her, "Your faith has made you well" (Mark 5:34). He honored women when he taught them theology. He told Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life, he who be-

believes in me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). He taught Mary in the Mary-Martha account (Luke 10), and he also taught theology to the Samaritan woman (John 4:9-29). As a result of this incident, his disciples "marveled that he talked with a woman." They knew Jesus had clearly violated the rabbinic oral law, which said, "Let the words of the Law be burned rather than committed to a woman..." (Sotah), and Hebrew men in Jesus' day were also taught, "One is not as much as to greet a woman" (Berakhoth).

All three Synoptic Gospels mention that women followed Jesus. Such behavior ran counter to the ancient practices concerning women, but Jesus did not chide them for their behavior. And just after Jesus' rose from the dead he told the women who had come to the open tomb to go and tell his disciples he had risen from the dead (Matthew 28:10). John's Gospel tells us that Peter and John also came to the open tomb. So why did Jesus not tell them to go and tell the other disciples? Why did he choose the women to tell his male disciples? The answer is not hard to see, especially when one remembers that he so often came to the defense of the deprived and oppressed. In choosing the women to tell the disciples, he in effect brought to mind his own words, spoken on another occasion, "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Matthew 19:30).

Jesus also rejected the ancient idea that adultery was determined by a woman's marital status when he said that whoever looks at a woman with lust in his heart has already committed adultery (Matthew 5:28). The marital status of a woman was irrelevant. Sex outside of marriage violated God's will, not a man's property, his wife.

- Christianity Implements Jesus' View of Women

As apostolic Christianity spread, it gave women freedom and dignity unknown to the ancient world. It did this not only by baptizing and admitting women to the Lord's Supper--equal to men--but it also gave them leadership roles. St. Paul notes that Apphia "our sister" was a leader in a house church in Colossae (Philemon 2). In Laodicea there was Nympha who had "a church in her house" (Colossians 4:15), and in Ephesus, Priscilla was one of Paul's fellow workers (Romans 16:3). Phoebe was a key female leader in the church in Cenchreae, where she was a deacon (not deaconess) and a leading officer (Romans 16:1-2). Paul also said Euodia and Syntyche "labored with him in the gospel ... and the rest of my fellow workers" (Philippians 4:2-3).

Christ's influence had numerous other effects that benefited women. Unlike the pagan Greco-Romans, the early Christians valued baby girls as much as boys. St. Paul commanded husbands to love their

wives as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5:25). Women obtained bridal freedom by being able to accept or reject male suitors. In A.D. 374, the Emperor Valentinian I (a Christian) repealed the old patria potestas law that gave the husband the power of life or death over his wife and family. And in time even the veiling of women ceased. In India, the British in 1829, influenced by Christian values, outlawed suttee (widow burning), and in China, with the efforts of Christian missionaries the cruel practice of binding the feet of young girls was outlawed in 1912.

With these revolutionary changes for women, one is reminded of one scholar's poignant words, "The birth of Jesus was the turning in the history of women." Another has noted, "Whatever else our Lord did, he immeasurably exalted womanhood." Yet neither Christ nor the early Christians ever preached a political revolution. Rather, it was Christ's example that his followers reflected in their relationships with women, establishing their dignity, freedom, and rights to a level previously unknown in any culture.

To be sure, given the sinful nature of human beings, there were times that some erring Christians ignored or even violated the standards Christ and his apostles accorded women. But in time the freedom and dignity that Christ bestowed on women continued to unfold in the Western world. Thus, one can unequivocally state that women have attained the greatest amount of freedom and dignity where Christianity has had the greatest presence, and they have attained the least freedom and dignity where Christianity has had little or no presence. Soli Deo Gloria.

EDITOR'S NOTE: Alvin J. Schmidt, Ph.D. is Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Illinois College. Dr. Alvin J. Schmidt has published seven books. His book HOW CHRISTIANITY CHANGED THE WORLD (Zondervan, 2004) informs readers about facts not printed in our school's history books, namely, how Christianity sanctified human life, introduced charity in the non-charitable Greco-Roman world, gave freedom to women, built world's first hospitals, undergirded science, prompted liberty and justice, aided economic freedom, abolished slavery, enhanced the fine arts, produced edifying literature, etc. Schmidt's other book THE GREAT DIVIDE: THE FAILURE OF ISLAM AND THE TRIUMPH OF THE WEST (Regina Orthodox Press, 2004) is also very revealing. It contrasts the life of Jesus with Muhammad, shows Islam is not a religion of peace, proves the Qu'ran advocates violence, argues that radical Muslims are simply true Muslims, documents a largely unknown view of the Crusades, and illustrates how the West's political correctness is Islam's greatest ally.

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Moviegoers beware!

"The Golden Compass" is a definite DON'T SEE!

"The Golden Compass" based on atheist writer Philip Pullman's fantasy trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, is set to hit theaters on December 7. "The Golden Compass" is the first in the series and is being promoted as the Christmas-time blockbuster for youngsters. The blatantly anti-religious materials have been taken out of the movie, but many Christian media experts believe this is simply a way of baiting young moviegoers into reading Pullman's overtly anti-Christian, anti-God writings. The author hope that his atheist message will supplant children's love for *The Chronicles of Narnia*, *Lord of the Rings*, and other Christian-based fantasy books.

Christian Post writer Katherine T. Phan describes Pullman and his writings as follows:

The author, who is an honorary associate at Britain's National Secular Society and supporter of the British Humanist Association, has also admitted that *His Dark Materials* is a response to Christian author C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia*.

"I loathe the 'Narnia' books," Pullman has said in previous press interviews. "I hate them with a deep and bitter passion, with their view of childhood as a golden age from which sexuality and adulthood are a falling away."

In Pullman's story, a malevolent governing body called "the Church," which answers to the "Vatican Council," is known to kidnap children for experimentation. With the help of a golden compass that reveals a coded answer to any question asked by the user, Lyra, by the trilogy's end, gets to the bottom of the missing children and kills a character called "God."

Movie Guide director, Dr. Ted Baehr in a "WorldNetDaily" article describes Pullman's books and the movie as a "Narnia Knockoff."

Pullman represents God as a decrepit and perverse angel in his novels, who captures the dead in a "prison camp" afterlife. As one fallen angel tells one of the novel's young heroes:

"The Authority, God, the Creator, the Lord, Yahweh, El, Adonai, the King, the Father, the Almighty – those were all names he gave himself. He was never the creator. He was an angel like ourselves – the first angel, true, the most powerful, but he was formed of Dust as we are, and Dust is only a name for what happens when matter begins to understand itself."

When the hero finally finds this "god," he is ultimately described as a "demented and powerless" creature that "could only weep and mumble in fear and pain and misery." The boy then kills this "god" by breaking him out of his crystal cell, thereby evaporating him. The only "god" in this universe is matter.

One heroine in the story who turns from the Church did so when she realized "there wasn't any God at all and, the Christian religion is a very powerful and convincing mistake, that's all." Instead, the Church just kept her from finding love, thinking freely and pursuing bodily pleasures like sex. As she notes:

"I'd made myself believe that I was fine and happy and fulfilled on my own without the love of anyone else." Later, she says, "I knew what I should think: it was whatever the Church taught me to think. So I never had to think about [science] for myself."

There is no heaven in this universe, just a dank and dreary "prison camp" afterlife. Pullman thought Christians' positive view of the afterlife, like C.S. Lewis', was a "celebration of death." One of the characters the story's exploring children run into in this hell pursued spiritual things while on Earth, and regrets it:

"They said that heaven was a place of joy and glory and we would spend eternity in the company of saints and angels praising the almighty, in a state of bliss. And that's what led some of us to give our lives, and others to spend years in solitary prayer, while all the joy of life was going to waste around us, and we never knew."

The children in the story ultimately discover that true wisdom is doing what is right in their own eyes, becoming their own gods. As one of the heroes says:

The result of this "wisdom" is a focus on bodily pleasure over eternal truth. Although ambiguous as to what exactly happens, at the end of the novels the two children pleasure each other bodily and finally experience true joy.

Pullman's world is a sad, animalistic universe. Since this is the only world there is, the trilogy ends in hopelessness. Love is not selfless giving, because that would be useless in a materialistic world. Love instead is the lust of pleasuring each other. There's no heavenly banquet, there's no loving God, there's no order, and there's no peace.

My Thanksgiving

by Julia Benson

When I was asked to write a piece about Thanksgiving and what it means to me, I gladly accepted the assignment, thinking, "No problem. Thanksgiving is a great holiday. I'll be able to come up with something, easy." Unfortunately, the following paragraph is all I could muster about Thanksgiving.

Each year at Thanksgiving, my husband, daughter and I spend the day with family, whether it is with my side of the family or Tom's. It doesn't matter which family we are with, the day is the same. My heart is filled with a joyous thankfulness to God for the love of my family. The crisp air outside is a stark contrast with the inside warmth radiating from the stovetop and oven as well as aunts, uncles and cousins, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, and everyone in between. The day is spent eating good food and enjoying good company.

That is Thanksgiving.

That is all I came up with! Shame on me. So, instead of writing an article about Thanksgiving, I am issuing a challenge to myself and to whomever would like to join me. Perhaps I'm not the only one out there who's Sabbaths, both weekly and annual, could use a little more, well...Thanksgiving.

On Sabbaths, and particularly High Sabbaths, gone are all of the aunts, uncles and cousins, brothers and sisters, mothers and fathers, and everyone in between. They all think my religious beliefs are flaky. Since it's just Kiersten and me and sometimes Tom (even though he is an unbeliever, he tries to spend at least the evening meal during the Holy Day and Sabbaths with us, but not always) I don't knock myself out to make a huge feast likened to Thanksgiving, although I do try to prepare a special meal. I must say, though, I do try to set the Holy Days and Sabbaths apart in other ways. We have our Sabbath surprises for Kiersten each week and on the Holy Days. Sometimes it is just a little treat or a token. Sometimes it is something a bit nicer. But it is something that helps her to understand the weekly Sabbath and annual Sabbaths are important.

Of course we refrain from work on the weekly and annual Sabbaths, so that sets the days apart. And although we aren't Seventh Day Adventists, Kiersten and I attend church at the Prairie du Chien Seventh Day Adventist Church each week and it is a breath of fresh air just when we need it. Occasionally we visit a church group in Appleton, Wisconsin, which also

celebrates Feast Days. We take time for home worship on the annual Sabbath Days, having a children's Bible study with some songs and prayer, and then I excuse Kiersten and I have my own Bible study. Kiersten and I spend the day together playing, reading books, or going someplace special to enjoy the day. Tom comes home at supper time and we eat our family meal together.

Although these are great days, they just aren't like Thanksgiving.

As I write this article, it is smack dab in the middle of the Feast of Tabernacles week. How can I not think of Thanksgiving without thinking of Feast of Tabernacles? The Feast of Tabernacles is a week long celebration commemorating the wonderful goodness of God's great grace and love and protection. In fact, Robin Sampson and Linda Pierce suggest in the book *A Family Guide to the Biblical Holidays* that "The American pilgrims, who originated the Thanksgiving holiday...looked to the Bible (Leviticus 23:39) for an appropriate way of celebrating and based their holiday in part on the Feast of Tabernacles" (p. 346).

When I celebrate the last and greatest day of the feast in a couple of days, it will be just Kiersten and me. Tom has informed me that he will need to work, so it will be up to me to make this Holy Day into whatever I make of it. I know what I long for. I long for a warm and joyous family gathering committed to celebrating the majesty. So often I feel lonely and incomplete, like I can't wait to go home, even though I may be sitting in my very own living room. I think this is how I will forever feel until I'm in my permanent home, celebrating with Christ my king.

Lonely. Incomplete. Is it possible that this is how Christ, my king may feel until he can celebrate with me in Zion?

Here's the challenge: look to your Bible to learn how to give thanks to God, and then do it.

Speak to one another with psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord, always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Ephesians 5: 19, 20).

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about being spiritually ready lest one be caught by surprise and unprepared. Near the end of his ministry he plainly stated “No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, or the Son, but only the Father” (Matthew 24:36). Amazingly, Jesus included himself as among those who did not know the date of either his return or the end of the world.

On the other hand, believers were supposed to “watch” for it and be ready (Matthew 24:42, 44; 25:13). That was an invitation to endless speculation—but it also engendered a sense of expectation and urgency. Jesus had offered signs to consider: wars, pestilence, the rise of evil, etc. His “Little Apocalypse” of Mark 13 in conjunction with Daniel, Ezekiel, and the Book of Revelation present a host of portents for the faithful to “watch.”

“All ages are marked by perils, lawlessness, social disorders and upheavals, breakdown of morality and family, perils, turbulence and troubles that can serve as signs and stimulate expectations. They are portents; and there are always portents, always apocalyptic apprehensions, always fears and hopes to suggest millennial themes. Joining pessimism and optimism together, the millenarian message is infinitely adaptable to the circumstances of every age.”²

In the decades following Jesus’ resurrection and exaltation to the Father’s side, the apostles began to understand that the End would not occur in their lifetimes. They encouraged the believer to remain fast in the faith to the end of his life in the sure hope he would be raised to meet his returning Savior in the air. But there is not a hint that they understood the End to be at least 2000 years in the future. It may not come in their lifetimes, but they believed it was still imminent.

There appears to be divine wisdom at work here in keeping the End unknown. For centuries belief in the Second Coming—the end of evil, the resurrection, and the millennium—was the answer to persecution. Belief that it was imminent brought hope and comfort in the midst of danger, suffering and pain. For the persecuted and martyrs it was a vision of encouragement like that experienced by Steven as he was being stoned to death (Acts 7:56).

In the centuries following the apostles believers struggled with the same question, “How long O’ Lord?” They poured over the same scriptures and tried to make sense of them in light of the world conditions pressing upon them. There were, of course, fraudulent Christians using prophecy to gain a private following (we have those today), but I suspect most were sincere and able ministers, priests, scholars and lay leaders who really believed in the

prophetical schemes and time tables “revealed” to them. They were products of their learning and of their times.

The purpose of Christian chronology has ever been to date not the beginning but the End. As long as the End could be placed on the temporal, near horizon, chronology could serve the church, and from the second Christian century onward, the favored distant date for the End was 6000 annus mundi (A.M.), the year of the world or since creation.

There were various dating systems in use throughout the empire, from the Greek Olympiad dating, dating from the founding of Rome in 753 B.C., dating in relation to the reign of particular emperors, and others. The Jewish calendar measured the years from creation. Christians began to use annus mundi calculations to look toward the millennium and pegged its beginning date to what was thought at the time to be the date of creation.

Anno Domini (A.D.), or “in the year of the Lord”, is the chronological designation most commonly used today to list years after the supposed birth year of Jesus (the actual birth year is probably 2-4 B.C., or years “before Christ”). This numbering system was introduced in the 500s by the monk Dionysius Exiguus, but didn’t come into general use in Europe until about the eighth century.

Prophecies Shall Fail

Chronology has never been, and is not now, an exact science as the track record of calendar adjustments and failed predictions attest. A short list of prophecy blunders might include the following:

- A Phrygian prophet named Montanus (about 172 A.D.) proclaimed himself the Holy Spirit incarnate, said the Last Judgment was at hand, and asserted that John’s prophesied New Jerusalem would soon descend in Phrygia (West-Central modern Turkey). His teachings spread throughout much of the Roman world.
- Tertullian of Carthage (160-220) looked favorably upon the Montanists until the teaching was condemned later in the third century by various synods and by Pope Zephyrinus.
- The great church father Origen (185-254) who headed theological schools at Alexandria and Caesarea, while not a Gnostic (Gnostics rejected notions of an earthly Kingdom of God), was a Neoplatonist who sought to synthesize Christian belief and Greek philosophy. He attacked Montanism as heresy and taught that all prophecies should be interpreted allegorically: Antichrist symbolized evil; the thousand-year reign of righteousness was a spiritual reality achieved in the souls of believers,

etc. He ridiculed those who tried to take prophecy literally say they were "refusing the labor of thinking." Origen, however, took Matthew 19:12 literally and castrated himself making himself "a eunuch for the Kingdom of Heaven's sake."

- Augustine attempted to lesson the effect of "end of the world" speculations by making the apocalyptic a part of everyday life and belief by embedding it in liturgy and preaching, thus distancing prophecy from a literalist reading and notions of an earthly millennium. He discouraged those trying to count the years to the end of the world, admonishing them to "relax your fingers and give them a little rest." The Council of Ephesus in 431 condemned millennialism and Bible translators from Jerome to Erasmus expressed doubt that Revelation should even be retained in the canon.

- Augustine's prohibitions could no more keep his generation from calculating the end than for those who lived in the days of the apostles. In 410, when Alaric's Goths sacked Rome, too many Christians held that "from Adam all the years have passed...and now come the Day of Judgment." The mid-fifth century, Vandal invasions recalled calculations that the world would end in the year 500 A.D., 6000 years after Creation, and spurred new calculations to show that the name of the Vandal king Genseric represented 666: the number of the Beast.³

- The calculation of the year 666 inspired a host of apocalyptic speculation and dread as did the year 800. For many Charlemagne's coronation, by revised calculations, occurred in 801 A.D. and corresponded to the year 6000 A.M. (from creation of the world) signaling the beginning of the millennium.⁴

- End time speculation reached its greatest fervor as the year 1000 approached. Apocalyptic concerns dominated much of the thought in Christendom. Prophets and prophecies abounded creating both expectation and dread. Recalculations stirred up new apocalyptic fears in the years 1001, 1010, and 1033. Once it became obvious that the end was not yet, a Christian church and basilica building boom began. Many of those great edifices remain to this day.

- For a few years in the 1530s, the little town of Münster in Germany, with its ten thousand citizens, was heralded the New Jerusalem of a Thousand-Year Reich, ruled by a prophet in his twenties: John of Leiden. Like other true believers of his time, John was a millenarian (chilist) who was convinced that the world was about to end in terrible torments, followed by the millennial rule of the saints. He proclaimed himself King of Zion, instituted a theocratic reign of terror and polygamy, abolished private ownership of money

and goods, and banned all books but the Bible. He and his New Jerusalem were besieged by unconvinced countrymen; John was captured, tortured, put to death and hung up with his companions as an object lesson to millenarians to come.⁵ History testifies that the lesson has not been learned as we witnessed with David Koresh and the Branch Davidians in Waco, Texas.

- "The index of Mgr. Ronald Knox's study of religious Enthusiasm (1950) lists ten dates between 1260 and 1834 when a Second Coming was expected; and any diligent researcher could easily add ten hundred more" (*Apocalypses* by Eugen Weber, p. 28).

- Labeling various political and religious leaders "Antichrist" became common. In 1239 Pope Gregory IX attacked Emperor Frederick as the "Beast arising from the sea", one of the traditional symbols of the Antichrist. Frederick responded calling the pope the angel from the abyss. The apocalyptic insults continued labeling Pope Innocent IV the "true Antichrist!" since *Innocencius papa* equaled the numerical total of 666.⁶

- The Black Death that killed off half the population of Europe was seen by many as a fearsome sign of the End generating additional apocalyptic speculations.

- The centuries following the Reformation spawned renewed apocalyptic forecasts and an army of doomsday sects arose.

- Readers of Nostradamus know that he expected the end of the world in 1886, give or take a few decades.

- Both the year 1900 and the year 2000, the dreaded Y2K, were targets for date-setters and prophecy speculators. Charles Taze Russell founder of the Jehovah's Witnesses picked 1914 for "the end of the world." All dates have come and gone, but the end is not yet.

This brief list shines but a flickering light on an almost bottomless pit of failed prophecies. Those of us above age 30 can easily recall the Hal Lindsey's, Saleem Kirbans, Herbert Armstrongs, and their failed prophecies. We remember the doomsday cults like Heavens Gate, Koresh's Mt. Carmel, and the mass suicide at Jim Jones' Jonestown. An old acquaintance of mine gave me his prophecy flash at the beginning of the 1990 Gulf War began declaring Saddam Hussein "The Beast." The tribulation had begun and I was assured that this time (there had been other failed predictions) it was the real thing. Nary a month passes but some other prophecy buff shares a new prophecy flash, one sure to end up in the pit.

The Nature of Biblical Prophecy

A frequently overlooked fact of biblical prophecy is its conditional nature. Prophecy is not a video tape of future events, a blueprint that is fixed in all details, an inflexible pronouncement of what will happen regardless of changing circumstances. Virtually all prophecies are conditional whether stipulated so or assumed.

The prophet Isaiah was sent by Yahweh to the sick bed of King Hezekiah to tell him: "Put your house in order, because you are going to die; you will not recover" (2Kings 20:1-11); apparently a straight-forward prophecy from Yahweh of the king's imminent death. Hezekiah wept after hearing that prophecy repenting bitterly and appealing to God for mercy. As Isaiah was walking out of the palace God stopped him saying, "Go back and tell Hezekiah...I have heard your prayer and have seen your tears; I will heal you!"

God then promised him fifteen additional years of life. Some years later Jeremiah encouraged the fatalistic Israelites by reminding them of this great reversal. "Did [Hezekiah] not fear the Lord and entreat the favor of the Lord, and did not the Lord change his mind about the disaster that he had pronounced?" (Jeremiah 26:19).

Human action changed God's mind and hence changed the outcome of the pronouncement. Hezekiah did not die on his sick bed. The prophecy was conditional even though it was not so stated when given to Hezekiah.

Jonah was sent on a mission by Yahweh to warn the nation of Nineveh that in forty days it would be destroyed. Then, surprise, surprise, the Ninevites believed the warning and repented from the king on down. This was not what Jonah expected and apparently it disappointed him. But he knew in his heart that "you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2). God prophesied one outcome, but he changed because the people responded. God's threats were conditional. Prophecy is not set in stone.

The blessings and cursings that God prophesied are always of an "if" nature; obey me and these blessing will be yours; disobey and these curses will follow. He could promise the Israelites that they would take the land of Canaan, rout its pagan inhabitants causing them to flee in fear before them. Well, that wasn't the case with the fortified city of Ai where it was the Israelites who fled before the men of Ai. Why? Read the story in Joshua 7 where sin interrupted what God intended to be a victory march through Canaan.

The two theological principles that undergirded the Kingdom of Judah's life for four centuries rested on

two prophetic promises: Yahweh had sworn a commitment to David regarding the permanency of his dynasty—one of his sons would always reign in Jerusalem; the other is that Yahweh had chosen Zion as a permanent abode (see Psalm 132). Both of these promises were aborted when the Babylonians walked through the front gate of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar killed King Zedekiah's two sons, terminating the prospect of his family ever reigning in Jerusalem. He then blinded Zedekiah taking him to Babylon with along with the thousands of Jewish captives marching into exile. Nebuchadnezzar burned and demolished Jerusalem leaving it a ghost town. Psalm 137 and Lamentations picture the heart-sick and rejected exiles weeping by the "rivers of Babylon" (Tigris and Euphrates) knowing that God had abandoned them.

Both of these two great prophetic promises stood on either side of a massive "if": "if your sons keep my covenant" (Psalm 132:12). Human action will influence what God chooses to do. Judah's slip into idolatry caused Yahweh to march at the head of the armies of Babylon and bring disaster upon the southern kingdom. Jeremiah warned Judah to submit to the Babylonians or the suffering would be intensified.

God had abandoned the people, almost as radically as had been threatened. But that is not all the story. Exile worked to bring about their repentance and God responded: "For a brief moment I abandoned you, but with deep compassion I will bring you back [from exile]. In a surge of anger I hid my face from you for a moment, but with everlasting kindness I will have compassion on you" (Isaiah 54:7-8). God can forgive sins with or without a temple, with or without Jerusalem. What a forgiving and merciful God! He is sovereign and free to act as he wills in the affairs of man, his mercy, love, justice, and righteous always trumping all other considerations.

Prophecies can have several possible outcomes depending on what people do. Prophecy, when carefully examined, is much more general than people might expect and this has led some to fill in the blanks with private interpretations and details, and to speak where God has not spoken. The truth is that biblical prophecies are not usually stated with a great degree of specificity in order to allow God the flexibility he demands in their fulfillment.

God is abundantly able to work out his plan in the face of the Adversary's continual resistance, man's vacillation and rebellion, and constant presence of time and chance. The pressures upon Yahweh are complex and too complicated for us to fully comprehend. The pressures upon the human family are likewise complex and complicated. We can only see through a glass darkly. Our faith must be in God, not in whether we have prophecy and chronology thoroughly doped out.

The chances of knowing details of the prophetic future are nil, except in the most basic sense.

Most prophecies involved Israel and the divided kingdoms and have been fulfilled in history. They were time sensitive and while originally understood as prophetic oracles they can now be properly called history. There may be, in a few cases, some interpretive reason to appeal to the duality of a yet future fulfillment of a bygone prophecy. But to regard all prophecies as dual, as some have done, is to make vital sections of scripture into a parlor game, an exercise of reading tea leaves. Of the 27% of the Bible that contains prophetic material about 80% of that has already been fulfilled and is history. Some prophecies, such as those given to Abraham in the form of promises, are still being fulfilled. The prophetic warnings from the Garden of Eden are being realized daily. The prophesied reign of God on earth awaits and each day draws us closer to the Great Fulfillment.

All prophecy, fulfilled or yet future, contain lessons that translate well to how we should live before the God of Heaven. Prophecy is profitable if properly, respectfully, and intelligently handled. Beware of the prophecy pit into which many have fallen.

END NOTES

1. Knight, George R., *Millennial Fever and the End of the World*, Pacific Press, 1993, from the book's back cover.
2. Weber, Eugen, *Apocalypses-Prophesies, Cults, and Millennial Beliefs through the Ages*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 33.
3. Weber, p. 34.
4. Landes, Richard, *Relics, Apocalypse, and the Deceits of History*, Harvard University Press, 1995, p.290.
5. Weber, p. 28-29.
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Next Time: In Part 2 we will investigate the genre of biblical literature called "apocalyptic." We will attempt to answer the questions: What is the reality behind the symbols of evil and benign beasts, numbers, and why the Book of Revelation seems to be in code language? Why is the future partly set and partly open? How can God prophesy events and bring them about without abridging the freedom of either men or angels? What is the prime purpose of prophecy and the two-word answer to how it all finally ends?

Divine Guidance

by Donald Mansell

I will instruct thee and teach thee in the way which thou shalt go. I will guide thee with mine eye. Psalm 32:8.

How do birds navigate over vast distances without a chart or compass? No one knows all the answers, but some ingenious experiments that scientists have performed have cracked some of the navigational secrets of birds.

Some years ago scientists at the Max Planck Institute for Marine Biology discovered that a pigeon placed in a circular cage with identical food cups situated at evenly spaced intervals around the periphery could be trained to go to a cup in a particular direction—provided it could see the sun. If the sun's apparent position was altered by mirrors, the bird's choice of food cup was correspondingly altered, showing that pigeons use the sun to determine directions.

But this did not explain everything. Experiments done by Cornell University scientists showed that pigeons also navigate by the earth's magnetic field, when the sky is overcast. Magnetic bars were attached to the wings of one group of homing pigeons and brass bars of similar size and shape were attached to a control group. When both groups were released from the same unfamiliar site on totally overcast days the pigeons with the magnets became completely disoriented, whereas the others had no trouble heading for home. However, on sunny days no difficulty was experienced by either group. Evidently pigeons rely on the earth's magnetic field to home on overcast days, but override this instinct when the sun is shining.

Pigeons, of course, are not the only birds with uncanny navigational abilities. Among the most remarkable of avian navigators is the eastern golden plover. This bird spends its summers in northern Canada and flies across great expanses of ocean on its way to its winter home in Patagonia on the southern tip of South America.

One afternoon in early December, 1815, William Cullen Bryant noticed a solitary bird winging its way southward. As he watched in fascination the thought struck him that if God could guide a bird to its destination surely He could guide him through life's journey. Reaching home, he wrote his familiar poem "To a Waterfowl." It ends thus:

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the long way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

*Donald Mansell, New Every Morning, page 341.
Review & Herald Publishing Association. 1981.*

- 91% of students from evangelical churches do not believe in absolute moral truth (Barna Research).

Recognizing the life-and-death nature of the issue, the Southern Baptist Convention, to its credit, has even done a self-study and found that 88% of young people from SBC homes deny their faith before they graduate from college (quoted from codebluerally.com).

Like the Southern Baptists and other evangelicals, we have seen Sabbath-keeping youth abandon the faith in breathtaking numbers. The church is weak, and the attractions of the world are strong – almost irresistible.

Enter the Catholics

We attended the Code Blue Rally on Saturday night. On Sunday evening we received a visit from a friend we have known for over 20 years. She is a Catholic. Our friend showed up at our door asking us sign a petition to prevent the building of a casino just west of our town. Even though we had voted down a casino proposal just a couple of months ago, our city council was being wooed by gambling interests to provide the infrastructure a casino outside our town—at a price of \$3 million in taxpayer money.

We talked for a while about the casino, but the conversation gradually turned toward the deteriorating state of our culture and of the Catholic Church in particular. Our friend was very upset that Catholic youth are abandoning the teachings of the Church on morality and marriage, and are embracing the secular culture with open arms. She related a Catholic prophecy to the effect that there would be so much corruption in Rome during the end times that the Vatican would be littered with dead bodies at the return of Christ.

Our friend explained to us that there are groups of very dedicated Catholic men who are working with youth to try to reverse the trend, but she had to admit that the going has been difficult – partly due to the refusal of some liberal priests and church pastors to cooperate with any attempt to bring back a sense of morality and discipline to the youth.

Righteousness Is Your Strength and Protection

The point I am making is that religious people of all stripes in the United States and other Western nations are recognizing that their religions and their freedoms are in peril. The godless culture will grind up all who fall into its clutches into a colorless, tasteless, homogenous goo, and there will be no room in the mix for distinctive religious practices, and the

evangelists of this lofty nothingness are waiting to outfit each of us with gray Mao jumpsuits.

I talked earlier about returning to righteousness. The key to this return is single-mindedness. It is time to set aside the debilitating distractions that beset us and draw close to the One who can strengthen us during these dangerous times. If we continue to allow ourselves to be pulled in one direction by the culture and in the other direction by our Christian faith, we will never muster the strength to confront the challenges that are in our face. We have passed the point where we could casually observe these dangers from afar. They are in our living rooms, in our schools, in our malls, and in our churches.

Righteousness is the strength of a Christian. Righteousness allows us to stand toe-to-toe with evil and not flinch due to guilt or doubt. If you have always known that you could do better and simply have not done it, you will doubt yourself and be weak before the strong. Your own guilt will embolden the enemy to overpower you. Multiply doubtful and double-minded Christians by the millions, and it is easy to see why we are feckless in bringing positive change to our increasingly secular culture.

We are in a war with the agents of “spiritual wickedness in high places” over which values will dominate our culture—those that lead to sin and death, or our values, which lead to life. I wrote some time ago that we have forgotten the lessons of Balaam. If you remember the story of Balaam (Numbers 22 through 24), Moab was terrified of Israel, and their king, Balak, sought out the prophet Balaam to curse the Israelites. That is, the king wanted God to withdraw his blessings and protection from Israel so that Moab could defeat Israel. However, each time Balaam sought God to curse Israel, God blessed them instead. Although Balaam was unable to cause a curse to fall upon God's people, Israel, his advice to the Moabite king resulted in the death of 24,000 Israelites at God's hand by means of a plague. King Balak convinced the young women of Moab to seduce the Israelites with sex orgies which involved pagan rituals and making sacrifices to Baal, god of the Moabites (Numbers 25). Balaam was unable to bring a curse on Israel because of their obedience. God only cursed Israel after they became unrighteous. The Israelites' lust for sexual pleasure led to the violation of the first, second, and sixth commandments.

Righteousness was Israel's protection, and it is yours also. What is there in your life that has seduced you away from a complete commitment to do things God's way? Is there resentment and unforgiveness that is keeping you buried in the past instead of living in the present with God? What about your finances? Are you living so far beyond your means that

you truly are a "slave to the lender" as it says in Proverbs 22:17? Do pleasure and entertainment consume so much of your life that you simply don't have time or space for God? Are there sexual sins that are keeping you from being a light of righteousness before the watching world?


Ours should be a life of blessing to others around us. When we enter a room, the blessings of God should go with us to bring encouragement, strength, and comfort to those around us. If people hate to see you coming, maybe it's time for some self examination.

Satan is playing for keeps, and his forces are strengthening themselves as they encircle the camp

of the saints of God. Our adversary is seeking whom he may devour. Don't let it be you. Lay aside your sins, your distractions, and encumbrances, and become single-minded, no longer drawn in two directions.

"Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God" (Hebrews 12:1-2). □





The Great Falling Away

By Don Esposito

Revelation 12:9 states that Satan has deceived the whole world. Can this be true? The truth is stranger than fiction. It's shocking and eye opening. If you are a believer, this may be the most important book, next to the Holy Scriptures, you may ever read. Find out what the devil does not want you to know. And the Truth shall make you free (John 8:32).

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The Church in the World

Monday October 08, 2007

GAZA STRIP: BIBLE SOCIETY BOOKSTORE MANAGER MURDERED

Rami Ayyad's body found outside Christian bookstore in Palestinian territory.

AUSTIN, Texas, October 8 (Compass Direct News) – Police found Christian leader Rami Ayyad murdered early yesterday morning near the Christian bookstore that he managed in the Palestinian territory of Gaza. He had been shot in the head and had multiple stab wounds.

Unknown individuals abducted Ayyad, 29, as he closed The Teacher's Bookshop at 4:30 p.m. Saturday (October 6). The bookshop is operated by the Palestinian Bible Society, which Muslim extremists have repeatedly threatened.

The Bible Society shop was bombed in April after previous threats, destroying most of the first floor. In February 2006, unidentified militants exploded two small pipe bombs in front of the bookshop, destroying its steel and glass doors.

Hamas-affiliated police found Ayyad's body, according to news reports. Authorities with Hamas, which rules Gaza, have reportedly vowed to investigate and punish the perpetrators.

A Palestinian Bible Society release stated that on Saturday Ayyad had noticed a car without license plates following him. At 6 p.m., Ayyad told his family by telephone that a group of people had taken him and that he would return home late that evening.

Ayyad called later with a similar message, and a Gaza Bible Society worker reported the incident to police. At 6:25 a.m. yesterday, Ayyad's body was found near the bookshop with gunshot and stab wounds, the release said.

Ayyad is survived by two children and his pregnant wife, Pauline.

In addition to his work at the bookshop's front desk, Ayyad served as a youth leader at Gaza Baptist Church. He also directed the church's summer camp.

"Everybody liked Rami," a Gaza Christian worker told Compass. "He was just a good-natured guy. He was the most tender-hearted guy, like a teddy bear."

Tension has mounted among Gaza's Christians this year following recurring warfare between rival political factions and threats and attacks on Christians and Christian institutions.

"There's very little security left for Christians in Gaza," the worker said. "They're in a state of shock. They can't believe this happened. There are signs that say this is not going to get better."

The Palestinian Christian community has co-existed "somewhat peacefully" as a minority group for centuries with Muslims in the area, he said.

"This is definitely something new for Palestinian Christians for a young man to be murdered like this," he said.

Christians in Gaza number around 3,000 in a population of 1.5 million, with most belonging to the Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic churches.

During Gaza's summer war between rival Fatah and Hamas factions, a projectile crashed through a window in Ayyad's home. Shrapnel narrowly missed his wife and struck him in the back.

"There was more danger in the hospital than there was at home," the Christian worker told Compass, so Ayyad left without receiving medical attention. "I don't think he ever had surgery to remove it."



Notices and Advertisements

Stay the Course

The wind was blowing the waves
Mightily across the bow.
The ship was still afloat,
Though the Captain knew not how.
“Which way, sir?” called the young helmsman
With a furrowed brow.
The captain replied in a voice
That was weary and hoarse,
“Steady as she goes lad!
Stay the Course!”

“But Sir,” said the helmsman
“I can hear waves beating on the shore!
If we turn to the south
We'll find shelter, or a fjord!”
The captain, yelling
To be heard against the roar,
Said “Trust the charts, lad!
Don't make things worse!
Steady as she goes,
And stay the course!”

Finally, the ship found calm
In the shelter of a leeward bay.
Though the wind howled above them
In peaceful waters, the ship now lay.
The helmsman's face turned to peace
From utter dismay.
“Sir,” he said, “You knew the way all along
When the storm was at its worst!”
Said the Captain, “Lad, that's why you needed
To stay the course!”

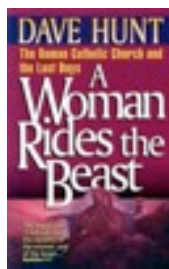
Poem by Robert R. Harvester

Personal

56 year old man, into physical fitness, loves the outdoors, gardens, and owns his own home; seeks to correspond with Christian lady with hopes of future marriage. For those who wish to contact me, please write to Terry Cromer, 147 Cromer Rd, Abbeville, SC 29620 or call 864-446-8969. Please send photograph.

A Woman Rides the Beast

by Dave Hunt



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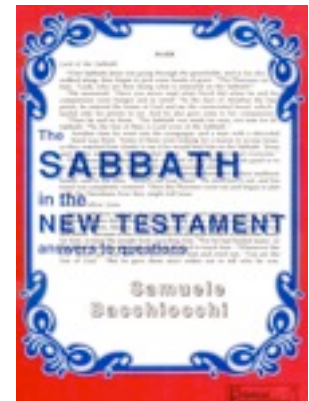
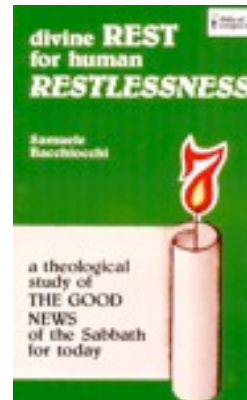
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These books by Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi are indeed a theological treasure (\$15.00 each). Dr. Bacchiocchi is the first non-Catholic to graduate from the Pontifical Gregorian University of Rome. He has authored several best sellers, and during the last few years he has conducted weekend seminars in many parts of the world. He is a huge advocate for the Sabbath, and Christians travel great distances to hear him speak.

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