

## **ENDTIME ISSUES No. 110: “THE SABBATH IN JOHN”**

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### **“FIRE IN THE CHURCH”**

**Lloyd Grolimund, Senior Pastor of Wahroonga Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sydney, Australia**

This newsletter differs from the previous ones because it contains two short essays. The first is my own and deals with the Sabbath in the Gospel of John, particularly the Sabbath miracle of the healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda. This episode is examined in our School Lesson for January 31–February 6, 2004.

The inspiration to post this short essay came from many encouraging responses received from readers of the last newsletter on “The Wedding at Cana”— the topic for the Sabbath School of January 10-16, 2004. Many fellow believers, especially Sabbath School teachers, expressed their appreciation for providing valuable research which helped them to address the debated question of whether the wine Jesus made at Cana was fermented or unfermented.

Several have encouraged me to share any research I have done on topics related to the current Sabbath School Lessons. Since the Sabbath School Lesson for January 31–February 6, 2004, examines specifically the story of the Sabbath healing of the paralytic at the Pool of Bethesda, as reported in John 5:1-23, I decided to share in this newsletter the highlights of my analysis of this episode. This research has been published in different formats in several places. This Sabbath episode is most important because it contains Christ famous statement: “My Father is working until now and I am working” (John 5:17). Christ made this pronouncement to defend Himself from the accusation of Sabbathbreaking for healing the paralytic and ordering him to go home with his mat.

Sundaykeeping scholars find in Christ’s appeal to the “working until now” of the Father, a compelling proof that Christ rescinded the obligation of Sabbath keeping both for Himself and for His followers. For example, in his influential doctoral dissertation, *Sunday: the History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*, Willy Rordorf wrote: “John 5:17 intends to interpret Gen. 2:2f., in the sense that

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God has never rested from the beginning of creation, that he does not yet rest, but that he will rest at the end. . . . Consequently, Jesus derives *for Himself* the abrogation of the commandment to rest on the weekly sabbath from the eschatological [future] interpretation of Gen 2:2f.”<sup>1</sup>

In view of the enormous significance attached by Sunday keeping scholars to John 5:17, I decided to share in this newsletter a brief summary of my analysis of this text. Unfortunately the Sabbath School lesson ignores the popular interpretations of this text as representing Christ's negation and termination of the Sabbath. The focus of the lesson is on the valuable spiritual lessons of the story for our Christian life today. This is a wise objective, yet we can hardly ignore altogether the current debate about Sabbathkeeping in John, because some of our Sabbath School Teachers and members are eager to understand what did Jesus mean by this famous pronouncement. Hopefully, you will find this brief analysis of “The Sabbath in John” helpful in your personal study of the lesson and in teaching it to your class.

The second short essay “Fire in the Church,” is by Lloyd Grolimund, who is currently serving as the senior pastor of Wahroonga Seventh-day Adventist Church in Sydney, Australia. On three occasions I have preached in this beautiful church, located across the street from our South Pacific Division office and besides our impressive Sydney Adventist Hospital. Pastor Grolimund has spent the last 13 years in full time ministry – 10 of these have been in youth ministry in South Queensland and North New Zealand. He is married to Deanne and they have two beautiful daughters, Hannah, age 5, and Danae, age 2.

With pastoral concern Grolimund provides a penetrating analysis of transformation in worship that many of our churches are experiencing in Australia as a result of Pentecostal influences. I was confronted with the problem about five years ago when I spoke at the campmeeting of the North New South Wales Conference. You may recall that I got into trouble for expressing my disapproval about the rock music that was played in the youth tent.

It is evident that the problem has not disappeared. On the contrary it is assuming alarming proportions. You will find Grolimund's analysis balanced and pastoral. His tone is constructive and conciliatory, not accusative. He reveals a genuine desire to find a solution to the problem of the

“stagnant” traditional worship that is driving most young people away from our church.

The challenge that our Adventist church is facing in Australia is present also in most Western countries, including Europe and the USA. In several recent newsletters I have mentioned the problem. Thus, the essay is relevant for our Adventist church at large. Pastor Grolimund has emailed to me the first two installments of his essay. A third and final one will be sent shortly. I wish to express my gratitude to him for granting me the permission to share his thoughtful essay with our readers.

### **A REPORT ON THE TV RECORDING DONE ON JANUARY 16-17-18, 2004**

In the previous newsletter I informed you about the recording of my SABBATH and SECOND ADVENT PowerPoint seminars that was to take place on January 16, 17, and 18, 2004, at the brand new Michiana Fil-Am SDA Church located on the campus of Andrews University.

I am pleased to report that the recording was very successful. In spite of the storm that dropped over 12 inches of snow over the weekend, a capacity crowd filled the church and the fellowship hall. I wish to thank God for empowering me to deliver a total of 8 PowerPoint lectures on the Sabbath and Second Advent during the weekend. It was a grueling experience for a 66 years old man like me.

The taping was done by a team led by Leonard Brown, a former student who is currently recording programs for the local TV station, Channel 16. I was looking in the Yellow Pages for a recording company that could do the taping of the seminars. The first name to catch my attention was “Lighthouse Production.” I dialed the number at 9:00 a. m. on a Sunday morning expecting to leave a voice message. Surprisingly, Leonard answered the phone. When I introduced myself, Leonard immediately replied: “I know you. Dr. Bacchiocchi. I took a class from you in 1986 and I sat next to you on the plane few months ago.” “Mamma Mia!,” I said, “what a providential coincidence.”

Leonard has spent long hours in preparing the platform setting for the recording and in doing the taping. At present he is editing the digital pictures

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taken with three cameras, inserting manually each single slide of my lectures. Note that I use about 100 PowerPoint slides for each presentation. In previous recordings of my Sabbath Seminar, the PowerPoint slides are sometimes unclear, because they were recorded directly from the screen. In this new recording the slides are crystal clear, because each one is inserted manually from the original file of my lectures.

The editing process should be completed within the next few days. In the next newsletter I will be able to offer you the new recording consisting of 10 one-hour presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent at a very special introductory price. The recording will be available both in 4 VIDEO cassettes and 5 DVD disks.

Our plan is to make these timely messages available, not only to TV stations like 3ABN, but also to our English speaking churches throughout the world. To make it possible for our churches in developing countries to receive the DVD recording which can be viewed in every country, we plan to subsidize the price and even donate the DVDs as funds become available. You will hear more about this project in the next newsletter.

### **A THANK YOU NOTE**

Thank you for informing your friends about this ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTERS. As a result of your endeavors, over 25,000 persons are now receiving this newsletter. If you have friends who have not yet subscribed, let them know that they also can benefit from these timely studies. All what they need to do to subscribe is to email me a message at <[sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com)>, saying: SUBSCRIBE ME.

### **“THE SABBATH IN JOHN”**

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,  
Retired Prof. of Theology and Church History**

In John's Gospel, the relationship between the Sabbath and Christ's work of salvation is alluded to in two Sabbath miracles: the healing of the paralytic (John 5:1-18) and of the blind man (John 9:1-41). The two episodes are examined together since they are substantially similar. Both healed men had been chronically ill: one an invalid for 38 years (John 5:5) and the other blind from birth (John 9:2). In both instances, Christ told the men to act. To

the paralyzed man He said, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk" (John 5:8); to the blind man, "Go, wash in the pool of Siloam" (John 9:7). Both of these actions represent breaking rabbinical Sabbath laws, and thus both are used by Pharisees to charge Christ with Sabbath-breaking (John 5:10, 16; 9:14-16). In both instances, Christ repudiated such a charge by arguing that His works of salvation are not precluded but rather contemplated by the Sabbath commandment (John 5:17; 7:23; 9:4). Christ's justification is expressed especially through a memorable statement: "My Father is working until now and I am working" (John 5:17; cf. 9:4).

### Negation or Clarification of the Sabbath?

What did Christ mean when He formally defended Himself against the charge of Sabbath-breaking by appealing to the "working until now" of His Father? Did He use the example of His Father to rescind the obligation of Sabbathkeeping both for Himself and for His followers? This is the position defended by Sundaykeeping scholars. Or did Christ appeal to the working of the Father on the Sabbath to clarify the true nature and meaning of the day? To put it simply, does Christ's statement represent a *negation* or a *clarification* of the Sabbath law?

In a previous study I showed that the "working until now" of the Father and of the Son has historically received three basic interpretations: (1) continuous creation, (2) continuous care, and (3) redemptive activities.<sup>2</sup> The exponents of these three views basically agree in regarding Christ's pronouncement as an implicit (for some, explicit) annulment of the Sabbath commandment. Does such a conclusion reflect the legitimate meaning of the passage or arbitrary assumptions which have been read into the passage? To answer this question and to understand the significance of Christ's saying, we briefly examine the role of the adverb "until now"—*heos arti*, the meaning of the verb "is working"—*ergazetai*, and the theological implications of the passage.

### The Adverb "Until Now."

Traditionally, the adverbial phrase "until now" has been interpreted as the *continuous* working of God (whether it be in creation, preservation, or redemption) which allegedly overrides or rescinds the Sabbath law. But the adverb itself ("until"), especially as used in Greek in its emphatic position before the verb, presupposes not *constancy* but *culmination*. The latter is

brought out by some translators through the use of the emphatic form “even until now.”<sup>3</sup>

This adverbial phrase presupposes a beginning (*terminus a quo*) and an end (*terminus ad quem*). The former is apparently the initial creation Sabbath (Gen 2:2-3) and the latter the final Sabbath rest envisaged in a similar Sabbath pronouncement in John 9:4: “We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work.” In this statement the *culmination* of the divine and human working is explicitly designated as the “night.” By virtue of the conceptual similarities between John 5:17 and 9:4, it seems legitimate to conclude that the “night” is the *culmination* for both texts.

What Jesus is saying, then, is that though God rested on the Sabbath at the completion of creation, because of sin He has been “working until now” to bring the promised Sabbath rest to fruition. That will be the final and perfect Sabbath of which the initial creation Sabbath was the prototype. A study of the meaning of the divine working clarifies and supports this interpretation.

**The Verb “Is Working.”** The meaning of the verb “is working” until now of the Father is clarified by John’s references to the working and works of God which are repeatedly and explicitly identified, not with a continuous divine creation nor with a constant maintenance of the universe, but with the saving mission of Christ.

Jesus explicitly states: “This is the *work* of God, that you *believe* in him whom he has sent” (John 6:29, emphasis supplied). And again, “If I am not doing the *works* of my Father, then do not *believe* me; but if I do them, even though you do not *believe* me, *believe the works*, that you may know and understand that the Father is in me and I am in the Father” (John 10:37, 38; cf. 4:34; 14:11; 15:24; emphasis supplied).

The redemptive nature of the works of God is evident in the healing of the blind man since the act is explicitly described as the manifestation of “the works of God” (John 9:3). This means then that God ended on the Sabbath His *works of creation* but not His *working in general*. Because of sin, He has been engaged in the work of redemption “until now.” To use the words of A. T. Lincoln, one might say, “As regards the work of creation

God's rest was final, but as that rest was meant for humanity to enjoy, when it was disturbed by sin, God worked in history to accomplish his original purpose."<sup>4</sup>

**Theological Implications.** Christ appeals to the "working" of His Father not to nullify but to clarify the function of the Sabbath. To understand Christ's defense, one must remember that the Sabbath is linked both to *creation* (Gen 2:2-3; Ex 20:11) and *redemption* (Deut 5:15). While in Exodus 20:11 the reason given for observing the Sabbath is the completion of Creation in six days, in Deuteronomy 5:15 the reason is deliverance from the Egyptian bondage: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and that the Lord your God brought you out of there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the Lord your God has commanded you to observe the Sabbath day."

While by interrupting all secular activities the Israelite was remembering the Creator-God, by acting mercifully toward fellow-beings he was imitating the Redeemer-God. This was true not only in the life of the people, in general, who on the Sabbath were to be compassionate toward the less fortunate, but especially in the service of the priest who could legitimately perform on the Sabbath works forbidden to other Israelites, because such works had a redemptive function.

On the basis of this theology of the Sabbath admitted by the Jews, Christ defends the legality of the "working" that He and His Father perform on the Sabbath. In John, Christ appeals to the example of circumcision to silence the echo of the controversy over the healing of the paralytic (John 7:22-24). The Lord argues that if it is legitimate on the Sabbath for the priests to care for one small part of man's body (according to rabbinic reckoning, circumcision involved one of man's 248 members)<sup>5</sup> in order to extend to the newborn child the salvation of the covenant,<sup>6</sup> there is no reason to be "angry" with Him for restoring on that day the "*whole body* of man" (John 7:23).

For Christ, the Sabbath is the day to work for the redemption of the *whole* man. This is borne out by the fact that in both healings, Christ looked for the healed men on the same day and, having found them, He ministered to their spiritual need (John 5:14; 9:35-38). Christ's opponents cannot perceive the redemptive nature of His Sabbath ministry because they "judge by appearances" (John 7:24). For them, the pallet and the clay are more

important than the social reunion (5:10) and the restoration of sight (John 9:14) which those objects symbolized. It was necessary therefore for Christ to act against prevailing misconceptions in order to restore the Sabbath to its positive function.

In the Sabbath healing of the blind man recorded in John 9, Christ extends to His followers the invitation to become links of the same redemptive chain, saying: "We must work the works of him who sent me, while it is day; night comes, when no one can work" (v. 4). The "night" apparently refers to the conclusion of the history of salvation, a conclusion which we found implied in the adverbial phrase "until now." Such a conclusion of divine and human redemptive activity would usher in the final Sabbath of which the creation Sabbath was a prototype.

To bring about that final Sabbath, the Godhead "is working" for our salvation (John 5:17); but "we must work" to extend it to others (John 9:4). The foregoing considerations indicate that the two Sabbath healings reported by John substantiate the redemptive meaning of the Sabbath we found earlier in Luke and Matthew—namely, a time to experience and share the blessings of salvation accomplished by Christ.

## ENDNOTES

1. Willy Rordorf, *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church* (Philadelphia, 1968), p. 98.

2. For my analysis of John 5:17, see my article "John 5:17: Negation or Clarification of the Sabbath?" *Andrews University Seminary Studies* 19 (Spring 1981), p. 3-19.

3. See, for example, George Allen Turner, Julius R. Mantey, O. Cullman, E. C. Hoskyns, F. Godet on John 5:17.

4. A. T. Lincoln, "Sabbath, Rest, and Eschatology in the New Testament," in *From Sabbath to Lord's Day*, ed. Donald A. Carson (Grand Rapids, 1982), p. 204.

5. *Yoma* 85b.

6. On the redemptive meaning of circumcision, see Rudolf Meyer, "peritemno," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed. G. Kittel (Grand Rapids, 1973), vol. 6, pp. 75-76.

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**“FIRE IN THE CHURCH”**

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As I write this article (December 2003–January 2004), the church in Australia is undergoing a considerable transformation in worship. Hillsong, Parachute and other Pentecostal influences are having an extraordinary influence on the shape of worship in the Adventist context. This development includes the introduction and practice of drama, Christian rock music, and an informal approach to worship that is directed toward reaching the un-churched secular mind of urban Australia.

Many argue that the vast numbers attending churches that practice this approach is evidence in itself of God's blessing. Almost on this basis alone the proponents of this phenomena insist on an aggressive and sustained effort to introduce and incorporate this worship into the church. To a large degree their efforts have borne fruit and Pentecostal worship is becoming part of mainstream Adventism in Australia.

This is especially evident in youth work where the Pentecostal form and style of worship is used almost universally by all the local conferences. A typical youth rally involves powerful preaching, drama, and plenty of Christian rock music. In many youth rallies/camp meetings etc, the music is the largest part of the worship experience often going for over an hour. The youth are taken to the mountaintop with heavy driving rock songs and then down into the valley with quite gentler tunes. Accompanying this music is dancing and clapping. Unquestionably many of the youth support this approach and this can be seen in the thousands of young people who attend youth rally's, Campoores, camp meetings etc.

The inspiration for much of what is developing through worship in Adventism is not created from within our own ranks. To a large extent mega Pentecostal churches are driving Christian training in Australia. Many Adventist pastors, and local church officers are attending training symposiums and seminars that are as professionally planned, organized, and directed as any secular program. In five star venues students are told of the infinite value of adopting the Pentecostal approach. Slick bands, experienced song leaders, powerful presenters, and worship that totally overwhelms the senses

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is an irresistible tonic for Adventist pastors and local church youth leaders struggling to see growth in their churches or youth groups. Add to this the statistics that boast explosive church growth, and a powerful argument to travel the Pentecostal road is complete.

The pressure this movement brings to church leaders who set the direction and focus for the Seventh-day Adventist Church is immense. It is hardly surprising that many are loathe to oppose this Charismatic drift, and it takes great valor to stand against such an overwhelmingly popular and apparently successful approach. That some do is evidence of their commitment to God and their courage.

This phenomena is not restricted to age, gender, or geography. From small country churches to large city ones the Pentecostal fueled revival burns its way through pews and minds all over Australia. Old and young alike are taken up with the excitement and vibrancy of this movement.

Those who dare to oppose this direction are marginalized as fanatics and placed with the lunatic fringe from the far right. Opponents are seen as traditional and narrow who are not capable of adopting a positive attitude to contemporary approaches to a secular un-churched society. Reputations vanish, friends are lost, and others are ostracized because of their opposition. Many are afraid of the consequences of standing against this movement and therefore allow its progress unopposed.

Others have embraced this Pentecostal drift and endeavor to advance its cause at every turn. They promote it in their churches; encourage people to the symposiums and seminars, then ensure its passage into the worship experiences at every opportunity.

More than one Adventist church has been split irreconcilably because of this. Throughout the length and breadth of the country there are churches, families, and friendships shattered by the impasse that Pentecostalism brings to Adventism.

Because of the metamorphosis of worship in Adventism in Australia, the church faces an uncertain future. Few would argue that the post-modern church will be very different to that of the past. How it shapes up as the current generation of young people, immersed in Pentecostalism, takes over

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leadership is unknown. Whether it is too late to reverse the trend is questionable. Only God, who knows the beginning from the end, truly knows where these disturbing phenomena will take us.

### **Worship is the Issue**

Worship has always been the issue between Jesus and Satan. This point is very clear in the Bible. Who we worship determines our eternal existence. How we worship determines who we worship, likewise who we worship determines how we worship.

Just as worship has always been the issue, so it will continue to be the point of contention as the people of God travel through the time of the end. This demands from us a careful and sober study of the subject. Only then can we come to conclusions that will be in harmony with the will of God.

### **God is Fire**

Hebrews 12:29: "For our God is a consuming fire"

Throughout the Bible God is likened to fire. We can see this in a number of places. Here are a few examples.

1. God was the fire that Cain and Abel were both seeking. Genesis 4
2. God was the fire that called Moses to leadership of Israel. Exodus 3:2
3. God was the fire that protected Israel in their sojourn through the desert. Exodus 13:21
4. God was the fire who gave the Israelites the Ten Commandments. Deuteronomy 4:12
5. God was the fire that brought Israel to repentance in the days of Elijah. 1 Kings 18
6. God is the fire that brings revival and forgiveness at baptism. Matthew 3:11 & Luke 3:16
7. God was the fire that set the Apostolic church ablaze. Acts 2

It is this Fire (*God*) that a post-modern world is looking for in worship. In fact worship is about the presence of Fire (*God*). Without Fire (*God*) there can be no true worship.

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**Adventism —The Fire Church and the Formal Traditional Church**

People (*especially young people*) are looking for Fire (*a real God*) in the church. They have been coming to the church in expectation of such an experience since our beginning. For those who have found God in the context of Australian Adventism, we should be thankful. However, for many this has not been the case. Often converts come into Adventism expecting to meet a real God leading a vibrant on fire movement. Instead they are met with formalism and tradition that rivals Catholicism.<sup>1</sup> This is a devastating experience for new believers.

Fire is present when the members of the church are committed, practicing Christians. This includes regular daily Bible Study and prayer, together with a spirit of humility and repentance. Church members with this type of experience bring Jesus to church with them. They are exciting, vibrant, happy people who are at peace with God and the church. Others are drawn to them and their church because they see Jesus through their lives.

Churches full of saved people are growing churches. The fire of God burns hotly from the pulpit, in the Sabbath School classes, and in the board and business meetings. Evangelism of the lost is the primary function of this church and all other activities are subservient to this mission. The Bible is the only practice of law, and all decisions and questions are resolved through adherence to its Word. The fire-saturated church is open to change when the change is in accordance with the Bible and furthers the cause of Christ.

The formal traditional church practices very little of the converted on fire church. This church is bound by history and common practice. Worship services are staid, monotonous, and predictable. Any change is seen as threatening and dangerous and is to be avoided at all costs. It is common for this church to be constantly looking within, and evangelism is a very low priority. This church builds walls rather than bridges to the community. It is not unusual for this church to be losing members rapidly. A few powerful leaders often dominate. Cold formalism has replaced vibrant spirit filled worship and as a direct result this church is dying or is already dead. Throughout Australia the bones of these churches lie in the sun as a testimony to the foolishness of such an approach – an approach to often taken in the conservative Adventist movement.

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**Response to the Formal Traditional Church**

Inevitably the formal traditional approach is a church that young people and un-churched Australians find unattractive. Jesus is largely not present and there is no fire. This approach very rarely wins souls to Christ and the reformation of the Middle Ages was a direct God led refutation of such formal traditionalism.

There are many basic responses to the formal traditional approach. Following are a few:

1. Stay in the church and help to build the walls and maintain the status quo. It is surprising how many feel secure and safe with this approach.
2. Leave Christianity and Adventism altogether.
3. Attempt to revive the church from within through a personal fire driven experience.
4. Attempt to revive the church from within with the Pentecostal model.
5. Leave the Adventist congregation and set up another Adventist church based on the Pentecostal model.
6. Leave the Adventist Church for another – usually Pentecostal Charismatic.

Point number 3 is the only response a fire driven Adventist can have. To often we take other approaches to the detriment to the church and ourselves. Each of these points deserve time and study. However it is point numbers 4 and 5 that the rest of this article will concern itself with.

**The Pentecostal Wave and Seventh-day Adventism**

It is distressing for most Adventists to witness the demise and deterioration of Adventism in Australia. Generally the church is not in good shape. Tithes are decreasing in real terms,<sup>2</sup> attendance is falling away rapidly<sup>3</sup>, and we are no longer able to support the mission fields as we once did.<sup>4</sup> Our young people are leaving us in epidemic proportions,<sup>5</sup> and any way you look at it the church is rapidly going backwards. As members and financial support disappear, pastors, administrators, and concerned church members are left wondering where this disturbing trend will end. What future, if any, does the Seventh-day Adventist church have in Australia?

Comfortingly, Adventism is not alone in its dilemma. Most traditional Protestant Churches are facing the same scenarios, and in most cases are in a more devastated state than we. Entire denominations are in danger of disappearing off the Australian religious landscape. Perhaps the only Christian groups perceived to be having any success in postmodern Australia is the Pentecostals. With their mega churches, large youth groups, and massive conversion rates, it is hard to argue with their approach<sup>6</sup>.

Because of their successes the Pentecostals are now the benchmark for modern Christianity. Their music, style, and spiritual approach have been accepted and incorporated into every facet of Protestant worship and practice.

Good theology demands that more than success be the catalyst for change in Adventism – especially a Pentecostal change. The Bible says, “Thy word is truth and a lamp unto my path.” Surely if we are to accept as a denomination the Pentecostal wave that is currently swamping Protestantism and subsequently us, then it must stand up to the time honored test of truth.

### **What is Wrong With Pentecostalism?**

What the Bible has to say about the Pentecostal movement is both interesting and sobering. It is only when we understand the biblical perspective on this amazing phenomenon that we will be able to deal with its advance upon the Adventist Church at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

As we have already seen, God's presence in the Bible is often depicted as a consuming fire. Every approach God has had to mankind, Satan has created a counterfeit. Take the following for example:

- i. God created the world  
Satan counters through evolution
- ii. God created the Sabbath  
Satan counters with Sunday worship
- iii. God says the soul that sins will die  
Satan counters that the soul is immortal
- iv. God says that the second coming will be visible  
Satan counters with a secret rapture

- v. God created marriage  
Satan counters with the concept of partners
- vi. God creates sex  
Satan counters with immorality
- vii. God creates food  
Satan counters with gluttony

Satan counters every action of God. Each counterfeit is designed to confuse and deceive.

God's presence as a consuming fire also has a satanic counterfeit - a counterfeit designed to weaken and eventually destroy the Adventist movement and its message? I propose that this counterfeit is the worldwide Charismatic Pentecostal movement.

### **False Fire in the Bible**

In Acts chapter 2 the Holy Spirit empowers the infant church with one of the most dramatic experiences in the Bible. The power of God was unleashed in the hearts of 120 ordinary men and women. Flames of fire descended into the room and alighted upon the heads of the believers. With their lives awash in the molten power of the Holy Spirit, this small band of pilgrims changed the world with the story of Jesus forever. As a result of this experience Jesus was taken to every corner of the earth. This could not have happened except through the power of the Holy Spirit in the hearts of the believers.

It was the presence of God through fire (*The Holy Spirit*) that brought about the miracle that birthed the apostolic Christian Church (*Pentecost in Acts 2*). Seventh-day Adventism is the direct descendant of this Fire driven movement. Not only has God blessed us with the truth, but He has also granted the Holy Spirit (*Fire*) to advance the truth. This is why a tiny movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century has mushroomed into a large international faith that has twenty million participating worshippers in almost every country of the earth.

Throughout the years Adventism has faced many crisis. Kellogg thought to bring the church to her knees. The influence of Desmond Ford saw dozens of ministers and hundreds of church members leave the work and the

faith. At times, but for the direct intervention and leading of God, the church may have fallen. And yet through all the controversies, apostasies and divisions, the church has moved on resolutely because Jesus is her captain. She cannot flounder. Yet now a new and different kind of threat menaces the church – Neo Pentecostalism<sup>6</sup>. This is the most dangerous challenge she has faced in her entire history, and it is this particular movement that this article is concerned with.

Pentecostalism is an interdenominational movement. Its sweeping influence pervades throughout the Catholic, Protestant and Seventh-day Adventist churches'. This phenomenon has arguably had more influence on modern Christianity than any other factor. Nevertheless there is still something wrong and there is good reason why this movement is so dangerous to Seventh-day Adventism?

At the basis of the Pentecostal Charismatic movement is the powerful leading and ministry of the Holy Spirit (*Fire*). Religion based on experience, and then truth, is the model advocated by the Neo Pentecostal. The evidence of this is manifested in a myriad of phenomena's and successes. Some are as follows:

1. Speaking in tongues
2. Healings and miracles
3. Spectacular growth
4. Prophetic utterances and ministry
5. Unity
6. Spiritual gifts
7. Secular success and wealth
8. Colleges and schools
9. Medical clinics
10. Powerful culturally relevant worship
11. Original music
12. Huge slick training conferences

Despite these attractive features that are leading many to believe in the Spirit driven success of this movement, a lingering doubt remains in the minds of many Seventh-day Adventists. There is an uncomfortable suspicion that all is not right in the headlong rush some of our leaders are encouraging the Adventist church into with Neo Pentecostalism.

The current generation of young Seventh-day Adventists are seeking God. They come to the church of their heritage (*SDA*) looking for Fire (*God*). In many cases, tragically, they are not finding it (*God*). However, unlike previous generations that left Adventism and Christianity altogether,<sup>7</sup> these young people do not leave Christianity – they just leave Adventism. The vast majority end up in Charismatic churches basking around the Pentecostal fire — and the fire burns hot. On any given Sunday afternoon countless numbers of Adventist youth can be found worshipping at Hillsong in Sydney. The overwhelming problem with this is not just the concept of counterfeit Sunday worship – it is the fire – the Pentecostal fire —it is false.

### **The Biblical case Against the Fire of Pentecostalism**

In Revelation chapter 13 we are confronted with two beasts. The first beast (verses 1–10)<sup>8</sup> has been clearly identified by Bible students since the Protestant Reformation as the Church of Rome. As we approach the end of time this religious power leads a great worldwide rebellion against God.

The second beast (verses 11–17)<sup>9</sup> is understood by Seventh-day Adventists to be the United States of America. With this in mind note verses 13 and 14: “And he (*USA*) performed great and miraculous signs, even causing ***fire to come down from heaven***<sup>10</sup> to earth in full view of men. Because of the signs he (*USA*) was given power to do on behalf of the first beast (*Church of Rome*), he (*USA*) deceived the inhabitants of the earth. He (*USA*) ordered them to set up an image (*false worship*) in honor of the beast (*Church of Rome*) that was wounded by the sword and yet lived” (Rev 13:13-14).<sup>11</sup>

Remember that the fire of Acts 2 is the Holy Spirit's presence and anointing, yet unlike the fire of Acts 2 that brought about the birth of the apostolic church, this new fire serves a dark and sinister purpose. Primarily the purpose of this false fire is to cause men and women to be deceived and leave Jesus. It does this by encouraging the world to set up an image (*false worship*) to the Church of Rome.

If “true fire” is the workings of the Holy Spirit that brings about revival, repentance and change, then the “false fire” of Revelation 13 must be the outpouring of a false spirit that deceives and leads people away from God.

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Could it be that the false fire of Revelation 13:13 is nothing short of the spirit led Pentecostal Charismatic revival (*false fire*) that has taken the world, and subsequently much of western Adventism, by storm?

Note the following from verse 13 again:

1. The fire comes from the second beast – USA.
2. It is miraculous.
3. It comes down from heaven (Is spiritual).
4. It causes the whole world to worship the first beast – the Church of Rome

Now consider the following in the light of the above points:

1. The Pentecostal movement comes primarily from the USA. This great nation is still the power base of this vibrant movement.
2. The Pentecostal movement is rooted and immersed in the miraculous. This includes healings, prophecies, speaking in tongues, dreams and visions.
3. Fire is the supernatural presence of a supernatural being. Christians identify this as God. The spirit that drives Pentecostalism is supernatural – it comes down from heaven and is spiritual – but I am proposing that it is not of God. As this article will show, the fire that burns hot in this movement has its origins in a darker realm.
4. The Pentecostal movement is uniting the churches of Christendom into an ecumenical whole. Baptists, Methodists, Congregationalists, Seventh-day Adventists, Catholics – we all find unity in a common worship experience – a Pentecostal one. It is not unreasonable to expect this to play a large part in the ecumenical movement that will unite the churches and religions of the world just before the end of time.

If the above hypothesis is true, then we must address the following questions:

1. How can the Pentecostal movement be accused of being driven by a false spirit?
2. Even if a false spirit drives Charismatic Pentecostalism, how does this movement aid in setting up an image in honor of the Church of Rome?
3. What role is Pentecostalism playing in the ecumenical movement?

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The final instalment of this article will investigate these challenging questions.

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> I believe that the formalism and tradition that is found in many conservative Adventist churches is a recent phenomenon. My grandfather, a minister in the early to middle years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, used to talk about a vibrant growing church. Many old time preachers alive today talk about a vastly different church to the traditional one some now worship in.

<sup>2</sup> See the recent and continuing study of Avondale College theologians Rob McIver and Steve Currow on tithing—their overall conclusion is that real tithes is depreciating at an alarming rate.

<sup>3</sup> Many city and country churches that once thrived have lost so many members that they are being forced to close and cease to exist.

<sup>4</sup> In the PNGUM over 50 pastors have been retrenched for 2003 alone. This is on top of the hundreds and hundreds of teachers, pastors, and church workers who have lost their jobs in the South Pacific Division mission fields over the last 5 to 10 years.

<sup>5</sup> That our young people are leaving us in epidemic proportions cannot be argued when an honest appraisal of our real situation is undertaken

<sup>6</sup> Hillsong Church (Pentecostal Church in Sydney) has an attendance of over 12000 people every weekend. Their annual budget for charity is over 4 hundred thousand dollars. Last year their offerings topped 10 million and their bookshops sold over 8 million worth of books and music. They have bought into medical centers and their Bible College has over 1700 full or part time students. This one church has a staff of over 200, including 70 pastors. The church building is worth over 25 million. There are five television cameras and their services are recorded in more than 80 countries. (Source material from the “Good Weekend, Jan 25, 2003”)

<sup>7</sup> Neo Pentecostalism is not heavily based in tongues, holy laughter and faith healing. These elements are only present in a limited fashion. The excesses of traditional Pentecostalism often come under criticism from the Neo Pentecostal. Neo Pentecostalism is more Biblically based than its happy clappy, tongues speaking, miracle-healing cousin—old fashioned Pentecostalism. With these extreme elements in the back closet, the Neo Pentecostal movement has found it simpler to gain acceptance into the

mainstream Protestant denominations. Nevertheless Neo Pentecostalism is still a religious experience based heavily in experiential rather than truth based religion. One of the reasons this movement is so dangerous to Seventh-day Adventism is because the apostasy is closer to the truth and more difficult to recognise. In this article Neo Pentecostalism is the movement under discussion.

<sup>8</sup>My experience is similar to hundreds of others I have talked to over the years. In a class of some 30 Adventist youth at an Adventist High School (academy), there are less than five still serving the Lord as SDA. Look at your own church—where have all the youth of the last twenty five years gone? How many are still serving the Lord? The answer most of you will conclude is frightening.

<sup>9</sup>Revelation 13:1–10: ‘I looked and saw a beast coming up from the sea. This one had ten horns and seven heads, and a crown was on each of its ten horns. On each of its heads were names that were an insult to God. The beast that I saw had the body of a leopard, the feet of a bear, and the mouth of a lion. The dragon handed over its own power and throne and great authority to this beast. One of its heads seemed to have been fatally wounded, but now it was well. Everyone on earth marvelled at this beast, and they worshiped the dragon who had given its authority to the beast. They also worshiped the beast and said, “No one is like this beast! No one can fight against it.’ The beast was allowed to brag and claim to be God, and for forty-two months it was allowed to rule. The beast cursed God, and it cursed the name of God. It even cursed the place where God lives, as well as everyone who lives in heaven with God. It was allowed to fight against God’s people and defeat them. It was also given authority over the people of every tribe, nation, language, and race. The beast was worshiped by everyone whose name wasn’t written before the time of creation in the book of the Lamb who was killed. If you have ears, then listen! If you are doomed to be captured, you will be captured. If you are doomed to be killed by a sword, you will be killed by a sword. This means that God’s people must learn to endure and be faithful!”

<sup>10</sup>Revelation 13:11-17: “I now saw another beast. This one came out of the ground. It had two horns like a lamb, but spoke like a dragon. It worked for the beast whose fatal wound had been healed. And it used all its authority to force the earth and its people to worship that beast. It worked mighty miracles, and while people watched, it even made fire come down from the sky. This second beast fooled people on earth by working miracles

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for the first one. Then it talked them into making an idol in the form of the beast that did not die after being wounded by a sword. It was allowed to put breath into the idol, so that it could speak. Everyone who refused to worship the idol of the beast was put to death. All people were forced to put a mark on their right hand or forehead. Whether they were powerful or weak, rich or poor, free people or slaves, they all had to have this mark, or else they could not buy or sell anything. This mark stood for the name of the beast and for the number of its name.

<sup>11</sup>Emphasis mine