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Rediscovering the Sabbath

*Adapted from Chapter 7 of **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE***

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A paradox of our time is that while some Christians are rejecting the Sabbath as an Old Covenant institution nailed to the Cross, an increasing number of other Christians are rediscovering the continuity and value of the Sabbath for our tension-filled and restless lives.

An increasing number of Christian thinkers are discovering that the abrogation view of the Sabbath derives not from Scripture, but from the "Christian" theology of contempt for Jews and their religion. This theology originated in the early Church and has plagued Christianity through much of its history, causing the loss of the precious Jewish heritage of the Christian faith by advocating a radical discontinuity between the Old and New Covenants, Law and Gospel, Sabbath and Sunday.

In their desire to recover the biblical and Jewish roots of Christianity, many Christians are taking a fresh look at institutions such as the Sabbath, which for too long have been regarded as a trademark of Judaism. To their

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Continuation of Endtime Issues Newsletter

Gianluca Bacchiocchi

It has been 3 months since Endtime Issues Newsletter No. 218 was published on December 4, 2008. That newsletter, entitled "The Meaning, Celebration, and Date of Christmas," ended up being the final Endtime Issues Newsletter published by my father, Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi. While we have been saddened by my father's passing, our burden has increased to keep my father's legacy alive. An important part of this legacy includes keeping the Endtime Issues Newsletter in circulation by inviting scholars to write on significant developments in the religious world that have prophetic significance for our Christian life today. The Endtime Issues Newsletter will continue the tradition established by my father to examine significant current issues from a Biblical perspective.

In determining what would be an appropriate topic for the first newsletter since my father's death, we went back to the topic that gave birth to the Endtime Issues Newsletters and the one that my father spent most of his life defending – the Sabbath. The Endtime Issues Newsletters grew out of debate that my father had with a former Sabbatarian, Dale Ratzlaff, who had written a book entitled, **THE SABBATH IN CRISIS**. During a four-month period, my father wrote 21 essays in response to Ratzlaff's arguments against keeping the Sabbath. These essays were published on the internet and distributed by email to thousands as the beginning of the Endtime Issues Newsletter. That debate also led to my father writing the book, **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE**, from which this newsletter was adapted. As the Sabbath is still under attack around the world today, this message on rediscovering the Sabbath is as relevant now as it was in 1998 when **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE** was published. May God bless you as you read this timeless study.

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Sale on Dr. Bacchiocchi's Books

All of Dr. Bacchiocchi's books are on sale for \$15, which is 40% off the original price of \$25. This special offer will only be available until March 15, 2009. To order, please go to www.biblicalperspectives.com and click the link for the Bookstore. Alternatively, feel free to call us at (269) 471-2915 or write to Biblical Perspectives, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103.

New Website Coming

The website for Biblical Perspectives, www.biblicalperspectives.com, is undergoing a complete overhaul to make it more user friendly, provide greater information, dramatically enhance the bookstore experience, and to update the general look and feel. We will be providing more information in future Endtime Issues Newsletters, so stay tuned for what will become a more powerful resource for your ministry and devotions.

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surprise, they are discovering, as Dorothy Bass puts it in her article "Rediscovering the Sabbath," that "the practice of Sabbathkeeping may be a gift waiting to be unwrapped, a confirmation that we are not without help in shaping the renewing ways of life for which we long."¹

Objectives of this Study. This study has two major objectives. The first is to briefly report on the rediscovery of the Sabbath by scholars, religious organizations, and people of different persuasions. After reading so many pages about the crossfire of controversy surrounding the Sabbath today, some may be tempted to think that the Sabbath is in crisis, as the title of Dale Ratzlaff's book suggests. The truth is that the Sabbath has never been in crisis because it is a divine institution. God's moral principles are not subject to crisis. The rediscovery of the Sabbath by Christians of different persuasions confirms that the Sabbath is not in crisis. It still provides rest and renewal to those who accept God's invitation to make themselves free and available for Him on His Holy Sabbath Day.

The second objective of this study is to explore, by way of conclusion to the book, **THE SABBATH IN CRISIS**, how the Sabbath enables believers to experience rest and renewal in their lives. This final section is a Christ-centered, practical reflection designed to help people discover the Sabbath as a day to joyfully celebrate God's creative and redemptive love.

Two Types of Sabbatarians. The rediscovery of the Sabbath today assumes two different forms. On one hand, some Christians are reexamining the biblical meaning and function of the Sabbath in order to develop a "biblical" model for Sunday observance. We may call these people "Sunday-Sabbatarians" because they believe in observing Sunday as their biblical Sabbath. They follow the Reformed, Calvinistic tradition which gives prominence to the *moral* aspect of the Sabbath commandment by viewing the observance of a day of rest and worship as a creation ordinance for mankind. Consequently, they promote Sundaykeeping as the legitimate substitution and continuation of the Old Testament Sabbath.

Contrary to Dispensationalists and "New Covenant" Christians who emphasize the radical discontinuity between the Sabbath (which they see as the sign of the Old Covenant) and Sunday (which they view as the sign of the New Covenant), Sunday-Sabbatarians recognize the underlying unity and continuity that exists between the Old and the New Testaments, Sabbath and Sunday. Consequently, they are eager to rediscover the biblical view of the Sabbath in order to better understand how Sunday should be observed.

On the other hand, an increasing number of Christians reject the compromise position of Sunday-Sabbatarians and want to rediscover the Sabbath as the biblical seventh day, both in terms of its meaning and experience. These seventh-day Sabbatarians sense the need to recover the biblical and Jewish roots of the Christian faith and to return to the beliefs and practices of the Apostolic Church.

The rediscovery of the Sabbath by both Sunday-Sabbatarian and Seventh-day Sabbatarians is motivated also by the realization that the values of the Sabbath as a day for spiritual, physical, moral, and social renewal are essential for revitalizing the religious experience of millions of Christians today.

For the sake of clarity, this study is divided into three parts: (1) The rediscovery of the Sabbath by Sunday sabbatarians, (2) the rediscovery of the Sabbath by seventh-day Sabbatarians, and (3) the rediscovery of the Sabbath as Christ's rest for human restlessness.

PART 1

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE SABBATH BY SUNDAY SABBATARIANS

Keeping the Sabbath Wholly. A good example of the rediscovery of the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping is the book **KEEPING THE SABBATH WHOLLY: CEASING, RESTING, EMBRACING, FEASTING** by Marva J. Dawn, a Lutheran theologian.² With refreshing insight she captures the meaning and experience of the Sabbath in Scripture and in the religious life of the Jewish people. For example, Dawn writes: "All the great motifs of our Christian faith are underscored in our Sabbathkeeping. Its *Ceasing* deepens our repentance for the many ways that we fail to trust God and try to create our own future. Its *Resting* strengthens our faith in the totality of His grace. Its *Embracing* invites us to take the truths of our faith and apply them practically in our values and lifestyles. Its *Feasting* heightens our sense of eschatological hope—the Joy of our present experience of God's love and its foretaste of the Joy to come."³

When I heard Marva Dawn present the highlights of her book at the International Sabbath Symposium, sponsored by the University of Denver on May 24-26, 1989, I was tempted to spring forward to extend to her the right hand of fellowship into my own Seventh-day Adventist Church. I felt that she did a marvelous job in capturing some of the fundamental meanings and experiences of the Sabbath. However, my thrill was dampened when I read the appendix of her book where she explains how to observe the Christian Sabbath from sunset Saturday to sunset Sunday. Dawn's attempt to invest Sunday with the meaning and experience of the Sabbath ignores the fundamental fact that Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days, as I show in Chapter 1 of **THE SABBATH IN CRISIS**, are different in their origin, meaning, and experience.

"Call the Sabbath Delightful." Another example of the rediscovery of the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping is the article "Call the Sabbath Delightful," published in *The Lutheran* on March 16, 1983. The author, Judith Fiedler Finn, an attorney, discovered the Sabbath by

turning to the Jews in her community. She discovered that "the Sabbath is a sanctuary in time. In fact, it is a time in which we can begin to experience eternity and its peace."⁴ She decided, however, that for her family "the most practical choice" was to make Sunday their Sabbath. Despite her husband's initial protest, she writes, "We plunged in 'cold turkey.' No work from sunset Saturday to sunset Sunday."⁵ She continues explaining how her family celebrates Sunday as the biblical Sabbath.

Finn's attempt to celebrate Sunday from sunset to sunset as though it were the Sabbath ignores the historical reality that the essence of Sundaykeeping has never been a consecration of time, but attendance at the Mass or at a church service. The recognition of this historical reality has led the Catholic Church, as well as over 4000 Protestant churches in the USA,⁶ to anticipate Sunday church services to Saturday evening in order to accommodate those who are unable or unwilling to go to church on Sunday morning. This may be good enough for Sundaykeeping, but it is not good enough for Sabbathkeeping because the essence of the latter is not primarily going to church, but giving priority in one's thinking and living during the 24 hours of the seventh day.

"Rediscovering the Sabbath." The article "Rediscovering the Sabbath," written by Dorothy C. Bass and published in *Christianity Today* on September 1, 1997, offers another fitting example of Sunday-Sabbatarianism. Bass speaks of the Sabbath as "the most challenging and spiritual discipline for contemporary Christians."⁷ She eloquently writes that "as the new century dawns, the practice of Sabbath keeping may be a gift waiting to be unwrapped, a confirmation that we are not without help in shaping the renewing ways of life for which we long."⁸

The problem with the article is that Bass wants to unwrap the gift of the Sabbath by trying to fit Sunday into what may be called "the Sabbath gift box." This does not work because Sunday is not the Sabbath. In fact, Bass has a problem deciding, for example, "What, besides churchgoing, is Christian Sabbath [Sunday] keeping?"⁹ She suggests that it may be a good idea to refrain from buying, selling, "paying bills, preparing tax returns, and making lists of things to do in the coming week."¹⁰ But she cannot provide a compelling biblical reason for abstaining from these secular activities. Why? Simply because historically the essence of Sundaykeeping has

been going to church on Sunday and not refraining from business activities. This can still be seen today even in the Bible Belt where many businesses open on Sunday as soon as church services are over.

University of Denver Sabbath Symposium. The scholarly community also has shown an interest for rediscovering the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping. An example is the *International Sabbath Symposium* sponsored by the University of Denver May 24-26, 1989. The organizer of the symposium was Dr. Stanley M. Wagner, Director of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Denver.

Stanley Wagner received from one of his students a tape of a Sabbath lecture I delivered at the First Denver Seventh-day Adventist Church. While listening to that tape, Dr. Wagner recounts, "I was absolutely overwhelmed by Dr. Bacchiocchi's address, in which he spoke of the Sabbath in the warmest, most loving terms I had ever heard from the mouth of a Christian. It was then that I felt the time had come for Jewish and Christian scholars to meet to explore our respective traditions relative to the Sabbath."¹¹

I vividly recall the evening when Dr. Wagner called me to tell me how impressed he was by my lecture on the Sabbath and by my book **DIVINE REST FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS**. He told me that the lecture and the book had inspired him to explore the possibility of convening at the University of Denver for an international Sabbath symposium that would bring together Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, and Sabbatarian scholars for the purpose of reexamining the relevance of the Sabbath for today. Then he asked me: "Would you be willing to come to deliver one of the major addresses?" I replied: "Dr. Wagner, I would be glad to come at my own expense, if necessary."

This Sabbath Symposium was truly a ground-breaking event that brought together leading scholars from prestigious institutions as far away as England and Israel. While some of the papers presented made an attempt to apply the values of the Sabbath to Sundaykeeping, most of them examined the history, theology, and relevance of the Sabbath for today. Eventually, the papers were published by Crossroad in the book **THE SABBATH IN JEWISH AND CHRISTIAN TRADITIONS** (272 pages).

What surprised me most at the conference was to hear some Sundaykeeping scholars waxing eloquent about the

Sabbath—a day they had never observed. For example, instead of critiquing my paper, Catholic Professor Dennis Kennedy, C. M., from St. Thomas Seminary, chose to present his own meditation on the relevance of the Sabbath for both the human and subhuman creation. He said: "We humans need to experience God's sanctifying presence. So we keep the Sabbath to (1) follow divine example, (2) acknowledge God as Creator, and (3) participate in God's rest and blessings. It is a sign of covenant between God and us—we look back to the past perfect creation and forward to the ultimate salvation."¹²

Prof. Kennedy continued saying: "I would like to suggest that this Sabbath symposium is not some kind of dusty, scholarly tediousness for a few learned doctors only; rather, it is an attempt to revise the relationship of Creator to creation and to define what our part in that creation is to be. Sabbath is meant to refer to rest for all involved in the process of creation: rest for the earth as well as for human."¹³ He called for the recovery of a sabbatical ecological conscience which consists in becoming the *curators* rather than the *predators* of God's creation. By teaching us to admire God's creation, the Sabbath teaches us to respect the natural world.

The willingness of Sundaykeeping scholars to reexamine the values of the Sabbath for the social, ecological, and psychological problems of our society represents a positive trend that needs to be encouraged. In time, this trend could well motivate Christians to adopt seventh-day Sabbathkeeping, not only as a philosophical value but also as an existential practice governing their lives.

University of South Africa Sabbath Conference. A similar conference on "The Biblical Day of Rest" was sponsored by the C. B. Powell Bible Center of the University of South Africa on June 16-17, 1994. The conference was partly called to deal with the question debated in the public press on how the Lord's Day should be observed. The question was stirred up by the refusal of some rugby players to play on Sunday during an international game in Australia. These players belonged to the Dutch Reformed Church that observes Sunday as the Christian Sabbath.

The conference was attended by about 100 scholars and church leaders of the major denominations in South Africa. The papers presented at the conference were published in a book **THE BIBLICAL DAY OF REST**. It was evident that the prevailing concern was to reaffirm the Reformed view of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. For

example, in his presentation on “The Meaning of Sunday as a Day Dedicated to God,” Dr. Francois Möller, President of the Apostolic Faith Mission, said: “Sunday must be observed as a day dedicated to God. To make this possible, there must be purposeful rules and behavior on the part of the church and every Christian individual. Things which need to be done, must be done during the week. This is not the day to catch up on the washing, mend clothes, clean the house, service the car, help children with school work, prepare large meals, go shopping, make appointments, etcetera.”¹⁴

I was invited to present two papers at this conference on “The Biblical Day of Rest.” The first dealt with the historical change from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity, and the second addressed the relevance of the Sabbath for modern society. The response was very positive. I could sense that though there was disagreement about which day is the Christian Sabbath, there was agreement on its meaning, nature, and relevance for today.

Three Dutch Reformed pastors attending the conference told me that they wanted to reexamine the validity and value of the seventh-day Sabbath for themselves and for their congregations. In fact, one of them came to visit me at the home of the Adventist pastor where I was staying and kept me up on a Friday night until past midnight. Another attended the Sabbath morning service at the City Hall auditorium where I spoke.

It was gratifying to witness a gathering of church leaders and scholars eager to deepen their understanding of the biblical Sabbath in order to find ways to revitalize Sundaykeeping. Such an endeavor, however, holds little hope of success, because as noted in Chapter 1 of **THE SABBATH IN CRISIS**, Sunday is not the Sabbath.

Historically, Sundaykeeping has been understood and experienced not as the “Holy Day of Rest” but primarily as church attendance followed by normal activities. The attempt of church leaders to make Sunday into a holy day today is a nearly impossible task, because historically Christians have not understood and experienced Sunday as a holy day. Moreover, people today are more interested in *holidays* than in the observance of a *holy day*.

The Lord’s Day Alliance. A final example of rediscovery of the Sabbath as a model for Sunday keeping is provided by the goals and work of the Lord’s Day Alliance of the United States (LDA). I became personally acquainted

with the work of the LDA several years ago when its Executive Director, Dr. James Wesberry, came to spend a Sabbath with our family here at Andrews University where I teach. After reading my book **FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY**, he wrote me a most gracious letter inquiring about the possibility of our meeting. He wrote: “It will be a great joy to meet and talk with you any time such a meeting may be arranged. . . . Such a conversation might add to my knowledge and give me additional ideas about how the Lord’s Day should be observed. . . . If you propose a time and a place for such a get-together, it will be an honor to meet and talk with you. I should hope you might visit me here in our office.”¹⁵

Dr. Wesberry came to spend Sabbath, December 2, 1978, with us. The visit was a memorable occasion not only for my family but also for him. In fact, in his farewell address to the Board Members of the LDA published in *Sunday*, the official magazine of the LDA, Dr. Wesberry mentioned his visit to Andrews University as one of the highlights of his tenure as Executive Director of the LDA. He was greatly impressed by the atmosphere of peace and tranquility that he felt was so pervasive in our homes, campus, and lives on the Sabbath.

When my wife and I took Dr. Wesberry to the South Bend airport that Saturday night, he said: “This was the most delightful Sabbath I have ever experienced in my life.” Then he asked: “Would you be willing to come to Atlanta, Georgia, next February 14, and be our keynote speaker at our annual LDA board meeting that brings together about 150 church leaders representing 21 denominations? I would like you to share with them some of the things you have shared with me today.” It goes without saying that I was delighted to accept the invitation. It was for me an unforgettable experience to speak to such a distinguished group of Church leaders. In my lecture, I spoke not only on how the change came about from Saturday to Sunday in early Christianity, but also on how the values of the Sabbath can revitalize the religious experience of millions of Christians today.

Dr. Wesberry was especially impressed by my book **DIVINE REST FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS** because he found in it new insights into the meaning and experience of the Sabbath which he felt were applicable to Sunday observance. In his Foreword to the book he wrote: “The author has dealt well with his subject. He has built a gold mine of Sabbath material and made an invaluable contribution to the strengthening of the Sabbath throughout the world! No one, no matter of what faith or

denomination he or she may be, can read this book without finding Divine rest for his or her restlessness.”¹⁶

Prior to his death Dr. Wesberry wrote me a most gracious letter asking me to do him “a big favor,” namely, to explore the possibility of establishing an endowed chair for Sabbath Studies in his name. When I informed him by phone that an endowed chair for Sabbath Studies at Andrews University would require an investment of half a million dollars, he told me that this was way beyond his means. We discussed the possibility of raising together the funds needed for this worthy project, but he passed away before anything could be done about it.

What stands out most in my memory about Dr. James Wesberry is his dedication to help Christians experience the physical and spiritual renewal that comes from the celebration of the Sabbath. Though I could not support his endeavors to apply the values of the biblical Sabbath to Sunday, I fully share his conviction that a recovery of the meaning and experience of Sabbathkeeping is indispensable to revitalize the spiritual life of Christians today. Christians who give priority to the Lord in their thinking and living during the Sabbath day ultimately give priority to the Lord every day of their lives.

PART 2

THE REDISCOVERY OF THE SEVENTH-DAY SABBATH

While Sunday-Sabbatarians are satisfied to rediscover the Sabbath as a model for Sundaykeeping, an increasing number of Christians today wish to rediscover the Sabbath as the biblical seventh-day. A comprehensive report on the rediscovery of the seventh-day Sabbath by individuals and various religious groups is beyond the limited scope of this essay. Interested readers will find a listing in *The Directory of Sabbath-Observing Groups*, published by the Bible Sabbath Association. This valuable source of information lists approximately 300 churches and groups who have accepted the Sabbath in recent times.

It has been a most informative and inspiring experience to contact by phone a dozen pastors who in recent years have led their congregations from Sundaykeeping to Sabbathkeeping. Unfortunately, most of these pastors have not published an orderly account of how they became Sabbathkeepers. One, Pastor Dan Gayman of The Church of Israel, wrote a brief report which is cited below.

For the purpose of this study, I submit first a sampling of recent publications rediscovering the seventh-day Sabbath. Then follows a brief report on a few Sabbatarian churches with which I have become personally acquainted. A comprehensive history of the many Sabbatarian churches and groups that have come into existence during the past 30 to 40 years would require considerable research and the writing of a sizeable volume. The few examples of Sabbatarian publications and churches cited below are only representative of the rediscovery of the Sabbath by Christians of different persuasions.

Catch Your Breath: God's Invitation to Sabbath Rest. A fitting example of the rediscovery of the Sabbath in recent publications is the newly released book **CATCH YOUR BREATH: GOD'S INVITATION TO SABBATH REST** (1997), authored by Don Postema who serves as pastor of the Campus Chapel at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. The book, which is published by CRC (Christian Reformed Church), provides a practical and creative study of the meaning of the Sabbath for today. In his spiritual search for inner peace and rest, Postema tried various resources including Eastern meditation until he was struck by the fact that “Jews and Christians have a practice as near as our Bible, as close as our tradition, as available as the next ten minutes or weekend: the Sabbath.”¹⁷

Postema explains that “The Sabbath is a gift from God given to humanity right from the beginning. An attitude waiting to be lived ever since Moses received the Ten Commandments and Jesus declared the Sabbath was made for us! A promise that unfolds the more we participate in it. A vacation with God planned from the beginning to be enjoyed into eternity.”¹⁸

The aim of the book is to invite people not only to think about the Sabbath but also to *practice* it. Postema writes: “The benefit of the Sabbath is not simply in the study of it but most assuredly in the practice of it—in *living* Sabbath. Reading and thinking about Sabbath is like reading travel brochures and dreaming about great vacation spots but never going there for a vacation. It is interesting. You can learn a lot. But you can't have the experience unless you make the journey.

“This book is something like a travel guide to an intriguing vacation spot. But I hope you don't simply read about it quickly and put it down thinking, ‘I might like to go there some time.’ Rather, I hope that together

we can experience a vacation with God.”¹⁹ Contrary to other authors who study the Sabbath as a role model for Sundaykeeping, Postema focuses exclusively on the biblical seventh-day Sabbath. I found no attempts in the book to apply the values of the Sabbath to Sunday.

Restore. An unusual journal called *Restore* was recently started by Dr. John D. Garr, founder of the Restoration Foundation. Garr has pioneered research, writing, and teaching on the Hebrew foundations of the Christian faith for the past thirty years. The aim of *Restore* is to promote the recovery of the biblical Hebrew heritage to the Christian believer. The contributors are mostly scholars who write within their field of expertise.

I have been invited to contribute articles to *Restore* and to participate in their Dallas-based radio program, *The Roots of Yeshua*. The Sabbath has been the major topic discussed in three radio talk shows. Several articles on the Sabbath have been published in *Restore*. One of them, “How to Have a Family Shabbat,” suggests an order of service for opening the Sabbath in a Christian home.²⁰

What I find surprising about this organization is that it is transdenominational and multi-ethnic. It claims no religious affiliation. It simply exists to help Christians of all faiths recover vital aspects of their Hebrew heritage, like the Sabbath, that have been lost as a result of centuries of anti-Judaism and anti-Semitism. These people represent a fine example of educated Christians who are eager to rediscover long-forgotten biblical truths, like the Sabbath.

Hemisphere. A most unlikely place to find an article discussing the rediscovery of the Sabbath is *Hemisphere*, the magazine of United Airlines. I was surprised on a United Airline flight to the West Coast to read in the July 1997 issue of *Hemisphere* a delightful article entitled “Ancient Wisdom,” written by Nan Chase, a frequent contributor to *The Washington Post*. Chase tells the story of how she discovered the Sabbath by reading about it in a Jewish book about Holy Days. She came across the book at the very time she and her husband went to a marriage counselor because they were deadlocked “over crises of time management, of growth and change.”²¹

Chase was “electrified” when she read: “The Sabbath marks the difference between man and all other creatures that live in the universe.”²² She noted that “this day of rest was to be observed in order for humans to cease the everyday struggle for existence and to enjoy life’s material and spiritual gifts.”²³

She decided to begin observing the Sabbath from “sundown Friday until sundown Saturday” by resting: “No cooking, no shopping or paying of bills, no pulling of weeds or pruning shrubs, no cleaning or repairing the house, nor even talking about or thinking about work and the office. The Sabbath is a day without labor, a time to savor the sweetness of life . . . My personal life, my professional life, and my family life have all improved, and I plan to go on celebrating the Sabbath.”²⁴ What an inspiring testimony to be found, of all places, in an airline magazine. This is but one example of how different people today are rediscovering the blessings of Sabbathkeeping for their families, marriages, and personal lives.

Du Sabbat au Dimanche. The next example of rediscovering the Sabbath sounds almost too nice to be true. A Belgian Benedictine monk, Ferdinand Poswick, Director of the Center for Biblical Information at the Abbey of Maredsous in Belgium, ordered a copy of my dissertation **FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY**, when it first came out from the pontifical Gregorian University Press in 1977. Being impressed by documents and arguments which indicate the continuity, validity, and value of the Sabbath for the Christian life today, Poswick decided to contact me during his trip to America in 1982. He never anticipated meeting me in Dallas at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature.

At the Dallas meeting, Poswick shared his great desire to translate and publish the book into French if I would give him permission. He felt that the book could contribute to the recovery of the biblical values of the Sabbath for today. I was delighted to grant him permission, forfeiting royalties in view of the cost of translation.

Poswick supervised the translation done by another Benedictine monk, Dominique Sebire, who worked for almost two years on this project, producing a superb French translation. The French title of the book is **DU SABBAT AU DIMANCHE**. Poswick and Sebire did all of this as a labor of love, without receiving a cent of compensation from anyone. They were inspired by the desire to help Christians rediscover the blessings of the biblical Sabbath for today. They verbalize this desire in the Foreword which I do my best here to translate from French into English.

“Did Jesus of Nazareth abolish the Sabbath? Paul, who was often accused by his own Jewish brethren of many transgressions—was he ever accused of

Sabbathbreaking? Why then did Christians stop observing the Sabbath beginning from the fourth century? Was it perhaps to distinguish themselves from the Jews and to facilitate their integration in the rhythms and customs of the Constantinian empire?

“Doesn’t Sabbathkeeping remain a very visible sign of the break that occurred between carnal Israel and those who claim to be spiritual Israel? At any rate, should we not prefer the sincere and truthful celebration of the Sabbath unto God to the pharisaism of a paganized Sunday? [Isn’t this a daring statement to make by Benedictine monks?]

“Some Christians, the Seventh-day Adventists, often considered as marginal among the main line denominations, do observe the Sabbath. One of their theologians wished to verify the historical sources dealing with the change from the observance of the Sabbath to the observance of Sunday...[biographical information about me follows]. For the reflection of Christians we present this research that the author has adapted for the American edition of his dissertation.

“May this thorough study stimulate biblical, patristic, and liturgical research, challenging everyone to return to the sources, improve the methodology of research, and reexamine afresh a truth [that is, the Sabbath truth] which the author presents with the conviction of someone who has found in the celebration of the Sabbath a spiritual enrichment which gives a special quality to his faith in the Resurrection and Return of Christ.”²⁵

Words fail to express my heartfelt appreciation to these dedicated Benedictine monks, not only for giving unstintingly their time and skills to this project, but also for daring to challenge Christians to “reexamine afresh” the values of the Sabbath which can bring spiritual enrichment to our Christian life today. It is hard for me to believe that they succeeded in having the French edition of my dissertation **DU SABBAT AU DIMANCHE** published and distributed through Catholic bookstores.

The sampling of publications cited above reflect the growing interest for rediscovering the Sabbath on the part of Christian thinkers of different persuasions. At this juncture, I would like to mention a few churches and groups who have rediscovered the Sabbath in recent times. No special mention will be made of the rediscovery of the Sabbath by older Sabbatarian churches, like the Seventh-day Adventist Church, the Seventh Day Baptist Church, or the Church of God

Seventh-day, since all of these churches have been in existence for a longer time.

Various “Churches of God.” Numerous recently established Sabbatarian churches and independent congregations have adopted the name of “Church of God” with or without additional qualifying designations. Several of them use the name “Church of God Seventh-day,” the larger of which has its headquarters in Denver, Colorado. On several occasions I have been invited to speak at their gatherings. Others use variations of the same name such as “Church of God The Eternal,” “Church of God and Saints in Christ,” “Church of God Fellowship,” “Church of God in Truth,” “Church of God, Jerusalem,” “Church of God of the Ozarks,” “Church of God, Philadelphian Era,” etc.

Several new Churches of God have come into existence as a result of the doctrinal changes recently introduced by the leadership of the Worldwide Church of God (WCG). The Pastor General of the WCG, Joseph Tkach, Jr., supported by a few close advisers, adopted the “New Covenant” theology.

Early in 1995, Tkach informed his members that their beliefs in the Sabbath, Holy Days, tithing, clean and unclean meats, and other things were part of the Old Covenant and no longer binding upon Christians today. The result of these doctrinal changes has been a massive exodus of approximately 70,000 members who chose to leave the WCG rather than give up doctrines such as the Sabbath, which had been vital to their spiritual life.

About half of the members who left the WCG have joined newly formed “Churches of God” such as the United Church of God, Global Church of God, Church of God International, and Philadelphia Church of God. Some time ago, *The Journal*, a paper that publishes “News of the Churches of God,” listed about seventy different “Churches of God” that trace their roots to the WCG. It is estimated that an almost equal number of former WCG members have not as yet joined any church. They often refer to themselves as “Living Room Sabbatarians” since on the Sabbath they meet with friends for worship in their living rooms. At a *Friends of the Sabbath* Conference held in 1996 at the Sheraton Convention Center in Tacoma, Washington, about half of the 400-plus participants identified themselves as “Living Room Sabbatarians.”

During the past three years I have been privileged to minister to many former and current members of the

WCG at Sabbath conferences held across the US and overseas. It has been an inspiring experience to listen to moving accounts of the pain and suffering some of them have endured to remain loyal to the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping.

I vividly recall a gentleman who flew from Phoenix, Arizona to San Antonio, Texas to attend a Sabbath conference held at the Mansion del Rio Hotel from December 24-26, 1995. He told me: "After having been a Sabbathkeeper in the WCG for the past thirty years, I would have never imagined that the day would come when I would fly across the country to listen to a lecture on the Sabbath. But my family has been split over the Sabbath question. My wife and a son have chosen to stay on with the WCG and they no longer wish to observe the Sabbath. Out of desperation I decided to come to this conference in order to get all the help that I can receive." My heart goes out to these Sabbatarian friends who are facing opposition and even rejection from their own family members and former church members because of their decision to honor their Savior on His Sabbath day.

Sabbatarian Methodists. A Reformed Methodist movement, known as Wesley Synod, rediscovered the Sabbath in 1996. Bishop Steven Sanchez, S. T. D., told me in a telephone conversation that he presides over 68 congregations scattered throughout North America. The concern of the Wesley Synod is to return to the Hebraic roots of Christianity. They believe in the observance of God's law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular.

Bishop Sanchez explained to me that, though their denomination was organized only recently, they stand fully in the Wesleyan tradition because at one time John Wesley was a seventh-day Sabbath keeper and believed in keeping the dietary laws. He claims that this information is not found in later biographies of Wesley's life but can be found in earlier books. He promised to mail me some of this documentation. The Wesley Synod views itself as the resurrection of true Methodism. Obviously this has created some problems with the Methodist Church to which they are still committed.

The Wesley Synod observes the Sabbath from sunset Friday till sunset Saturday not only by going to church on Saturday morning, but also by abstaining from ordinary work in order to give priority to the Lord in their thinking and living. It is encouraging to see how the Holy Spirit is moving upon the hearts of Christians in mainline denominations to recover the Hebrew heritage of the

Christian faith, especially by returning to the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping.

The Church of Israel. At the "Friends of the Sabbath Conference" held in Sydney, Australia, June 1996, the participants were delighted to hear Pastor Dan Gayman relate in a most gripping way how the Lord led his Open Bible Church, near Schell City, Missouri, to rediscover and accept the Sabbath. As a result of the rediscovery of new biblical truths, the name of the church was changed to "The Church of Israel." Gayman's presentation was so inspiring that he was invited to repeat it in several Adventist churches in Sydney after the Conference.

Pastor Gayman graciously faxed me on September 6, 1998, a nutshell summary of the providential way the Lord led his congregation to rediscover the Sabbath. He explains that his congregation, being an Open Bible Church, was interested in following biblical truths wherever they might lead them. "Beginning in the year 1985 the Church of Israel [of approximately 200 members] made a conscious effort to study the question of the Sabbath. . . . The congregation studied the issue of the Sabbath for a period of two years and carefully researched every word to be found in Scripture on the subject, along with voluminous books on the subject. The goal was to bring the church into the truth of the Sabbath without loss of a single family." Incidentally, Gayman ordered my Sabbath books on numerous occasions during the time his congregation was involved in the study of the Sabbath.

After two years of Bible study, "in the late Fall of 1987 the ministers and the congregation made their decision to transfer their church services from Sunday to the biblical Sabbath." The official change occurred on December 17, 1987, "without the loss of a single family." Since that time "the church has never failed to observe a full scale worship service on the biblical Sabbath."

Pastor Gayman concludes his summary report with these words: "The transfer from Sunday to the biblical Sabbath has been one of the most important spiritual events in the life of the church. It has wrought powerful transformation in the lives of all the church members. The church has doubled in size and increased its evangelistic outreach to every state in the United States. The church has shared its testimony on the Sabbath with untold numbers of people and upwards of one thousand people have joined the church in the celebration of the Holy Sabbath around the United States."

The experience of Pastor Gayman and his congregation stands in stark contrast to that of Pastor Dale Ratzlaff and his congregation. Ratzlaff, a former Seventh-day Adventist Bible teacher and minister, claims in his book **SABBATH IN CRISIS** that seven months of a weekly study of the Sabbath with a group of his members led him to the conclusion that the Sabbath is an Old Covenant institution, fulfilled by Christ and no longer binding about "New Covenant" Christians.²⁶ The outcome was that Pastor Ratzlaff left the Seventh-day Adventist Church and established a congregation that meets on Sunday in Phoenix, Arizona.

By contrast, Pastor Gayman, a Sundaykeeper, affirms that two years of study of the Sabbath with his congregation convinced every single family of his 200-member congregation to accept the biblical validity and value of the Sabbath. These two contrasting experiences illustrate the point that one can study the Bible to accept or to reject its truths. The difference largely lies in what one seeks to find in the Bible.

Messianic Jewish Congregations. The rediscovery of the Sabbath has played a significant role in the religious life of the Messianic Jewish Movement which has gained prominence during the past thirty years. During this time, hundreds of Messianic Jewish Congregations have been established across the United States and overseas. These congregations belong to one of two major organizations, the Union of Messianic Jewish Congregations or the Messianic Jewish Alliance of America. Messianic Judaism is a fast-growing movement that is bringing the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ to many Jews around the world.

During the past two years, I have invited a dozen Messianic Jewish Rabbis to speak at Sabbath conferences held in different parts of the country. Their presentations on the Sabbath have always been most enlightening. At some conferences, the Rabbis demonstrated how their families open and close the Sabbath with a special ceremony by sitting around the family table which, on these special occasions, becomes the family altar. Their ritual is largely adopted from the Jewish tradition with new Christian elements.

Learning how the Sabbath is conceptualized and experienced within the Messianic Jewish community, can be an educational experience for Sabbatharians. The Sabbath liturgy of Messianic Jews may provide a model that some Sabbatharians may wish to adopt with

modifications and innovations. In my view, more needs to be done by Sabbatarian churches to help their members develop a meaningful family tradition of Sabbath-keeping that can help to keep alive the significance and experience of the Sabbath.

The rediscovery of the Sabbath among Messianic Jews has been a gradual process. The Messianic Jewish Movement gained momentum in the early seventies, possibly influenced by the events that transpired during the six-days war of 1967. At that time most of their members were Sundaykeepers. Rabbi Harvey Koelner of the Temple Aron Kodesh, a Messianic Jewish congregation in Lauderdale Lake, Florida, explained to me in a telephone conversation that initially his 500-member congregation had "a split personality." Some members attended Friday night services, as most Jews do today, but the rest attended Sunday services. Gradually, however, his whole congregation became Sabbathkeepers. I understand that the same thing has happened in over 95 percent of the Messianic Jewish congregations as they have come to observe exclusively the Sabbath.

Recovering the Jewish Roots. Some Messianic Jews were originally Sundaykeepers largely because their movement was originally sponsored by Sundaykeeping Protestant churches. Surprisingly, Sabbatarian churches have done very little to reach the Jews with the Gospel. I remember meeting with some Messianic Jewish congregations in Chicago in the early eighties in facilities offered them by evangelical churches. Since the mission to the Jews was launched by Sundaykeeping Protestant churches, one is not surprised that initially Messianic Jews were Sundaykeepers. This has also been the case with the *Jews for Jesus Movement* whose members today are still mostly Sundaykeepers.

What has led Messianic Jewish congregations to rediscover the Sabbath in recent times is their commitment to recover the Jewish roots of the Christian faith. Some Messianic Jewish Rabbis have explained to me that in their search for their roots, they discovered that Jesus and the apostles were Jews who observed the law, in general, and the Sabbath, in particular. They found that Christianity began as the continuation of Judaism, not as a radical break away from it. Consequently, they came to realize that the acceptance of Jesus as their expected Messiah did not necessitate for them to reject such an important aspect of their Jewish heritage as Sabbathkeeping.

An important lesson can be learned from the Messianic Jews. Christians also need to reexamine the relationship between the Old and New Testaments, Judaism and Christianity, law and grace, Sabbath and Sunday. For too long Christians have been taught to view the Cross as the line of demarcation between these sets of contrasts. In recent years, however, numerous scholars have exposed the fallacies of this artificial theological construct. They have come to recognize that the earliest Christians were believing Jews who were “zealous for the law” (Acts 21:20).

For believing Jews in New Testament times, it would have been unthinkable to abandon one of the chief precepts of the law, the Sabbath commandment. If Paul had dared to do so, they would have fiercely condemned his temerity, as they did in the case of circumcision. The absence of any echo of controversy regarding the Sabbath is a compelling indication of the continuity of its observance. We can only hope that Dispensationalists and “New Covenant” Christians gradually come to recognize this historical reality and abandon the artificial distinction they have fabricated between the Old and New Covenant, Judaism and Christianity, Law and grace, Sabbath and Sunday.

Sabbatarian Mennonites. The interest of some Mennonites for a rediscovery of the Sabbath can be traced back to some of their Anabaptist founding fathers who were Sabbatarians. The Anabaptist movement represents the radical wing of the Reformation. Their concern was to complete the reformation initiated by Luther and Calvin by returning to the beliefs and practices of the Apostolic Church. Because of this overriding concern, they became known as restitutionists.

Two active Anabaptist leaders, Andreas Fisher and Oswald Glait, became the pioneers and promoters of the Sabbath. Both of them suffered martyr deaths, largely due to their Sabbatarian views. Sabbatarians owe a debt of gratitude to these Sabbath pioneers whose work later influenced the origin of the Seventh Day Baptist church. The latter has been instrumental in helping the early Adventists and other Christians to rediscover the Sabbath.

Mennonite scholar Daniel Liechty has produced a comprehensive biography of Andreas Fisher through a painstaking examination of all the primary and secondary sources he searched out in various European

countries. His research was published in 1988 by the Herald Press under the title **ANDREAS FISHER AND THE SABBATARIAN ANABAPTISTS**. It was my privilege to write the Foreword to this important research.

Liechty carefully reconstructs the Sabbatarian theology of one wing of the Anabaptist movement. In doing so, he raises important questions regarding the theological consistency of the major Anabaptist streams that wanted to rediscover and restore apostolic biblical teachings and practices and yet refused to accept the apostolic practice of Sabbathkeeping. In a personal letter, Liechty informed me that his research has had such an impact upon him that he has become a Sabbatarian.

Liechty’s research is of immense value to Sabbatarian churches because it proves that the principle and practice of seventh-day Sabbathkeeping was rediscovered and accepted in the earliest years of the Reformation itself. Moreover, it provides vital information for tracing the historical roots of their theological beliefs.

I was made aware of the interest of the Mennonites in the Sabbath a few years ago when I was invited by the president of the student association of the Associate Mennonite Seminary, in Elkhart, Indiana, to speak at their chapel program on the historical change from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity. The lecture was followed by a pleasant discussion. At the end of the discussion, an elderly Old Testament professor, who looked very much like an Old Testament patriarch with a nice flowing white beard, stood up and made a daring speech. He said something like this: “I have listened attentively to the presentation of Dr. Bacchiocchi and to the discussion. It appears to me that there is a keen interest on the part of some Mennonites to return to the biblical principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping. Rather than arguing about this matter, why not open up our church doors on Saturday morning so that those who have this conviction can worship God on the Sabbath without interference.”

A few months later one of my colleagues learned during a visit to the Associated Mennonite Seminary that a group of people on the campus meets for worship on Sabbath mornings. This episode provides another example of the providential way the Lord is leading sincere people to rediscover the Sabbath.

Assemblies of Yahweh. One of the larger Sabbatarian churches is the Assemblies of Yahweh, with

headquarters is in Bethel, Pennsylvania. This church came into existence in 1962 largely as a result of the work of Jacob O. Meyer, who is regarded as the founding father. Since then numerous independent Assemblies of Yahweh have been formed. Though these share the same or a similar name, they function independently from the mother church.

In an article entitled "Why I Keep the Seventh Day Sabbath," Jacob Meyer recounts how he became a Sabbathkeeper at the age of 27. At the time he was serving as a Sunday-school teacher in the Church of the Brethren, formerly known as the German Baptist Brethren. Meyer recalls that "Approximately November 1961, the Sunday school lesson I taught to my young married people's class concerned the fourth commandment, the keeping of the Sabbath. We studied through the fourth commandment in the allotted time of an hour. After some additional study and meditation, I was not as convinced about keeping Sunday (the first day of the week) as I had been before."²⁷

Sometime later two couples spent a Saturday evening with the Meyers studying the Bible, especially the keeping of the commandments, including the Sabbath. The next day, Sunday, Meyer decided to study about the Sabbath rather than go to church. He writes: "I stayed home and applied myself to a serious study of the sacred Scriptures, seeing things I had never seen before in my Bible. I studied the subject of the keeping of the seventh-day Sabbath. I read the passages from my own Bible, and with the center-column references, through a word study I pursued the subject through the entire Bible. . . .

"After a long productive morning of Bible study with my wife, I turned to her and said: 'Honey, next week we will begin keeping the seventh day Sabbath!' From then on (early 1962) we have observed the Sabbath and we intend to continue to the end of our lives."²⁸ Later Meyer discovered that his forefather Johannes Meyer was a Sabbathkeeper in colonial America in the early 1700s. He belonged to the Seventh Day German Baptist Church.

The story of the discovery of the Sabbath by Jacob Meyer serves to illustrate again how the Lord uses unexpected circumstances to lead sincere people to find forgotten biblical truths. As a result of Meyer's witness and leadership, numerous Assemblies of Yahweh congregations are observing the Sabbath across North America.

True Jesus Church. The rediscovery of the Sabbath is a phenomenon occurring not only among Christians in North America but also overseas. A few examples are familiar to me. A rather well-known Sabbatarian church in China and the South Pacific is the True Jesus Church. It was established in 1917 in Beijing, China, by Paul Wei, Ling-Shen Chang, and Barnabas Chung, who had been affiliated with Sundaykeeping denominations. They claim to have received the complete truth regarding salvation through the guidance of the Holy Spirit.²⁹

Sabbath observance is one of their fundamental beliefs, as stated in the list of their basic beliefs: "The Sabbath Day, the seventh day of the week (Saturday), is a holy day, blessed and sanctified by God. It is to be observed under the Lord's grace for the commemoration of God's creation and redemption, and with the hope of eternal rest."³⁰

Although the True Jesus Church originated in China, its mission has spread to the South Pacific, South-East Asia, and other parts of the world, including Russia. At present it has approximately 1,000,000 members in China and 79,000 members in the free world.³¹ In 1985, the headquarters of the church was relocated from Taiwan to Los Angeles and "four evangelical centers were also established to meet the expansion of the work: the American Evangelical Center (AEC), the Europe Evangelical Center (EEC), the North-East Asia Evangelical Center (NEAEC), and the South-East Asia Evangelical Center."³²

Sabbatarians Overseas. In 1992, I received a letter from Robert Kiesel, president of the Polish Brethren Unity Church, inviting me to attend a meeting of 1,500 leaders of congregations in Western Ukraine on November 1, 1992. In his letter dated August 3, 1992, Kiesel writes: "During this meeting our brethren are going to discuss the basic topic of the relationship between Judaism and Christianity in order to establish a new Sabbathkeeping Church of God. . . . I hope you can find time to come to this meeting as one of the best Western Sabbath theologians and help us in the process of the creation of the new Church."

Kiesel's letter and invitation was sent to me through Przemyslaw Waliszewski, a scientist in the Department of Cancer Biology of The Cleveland and Clinic Foundation, an internationally known cancer research center. In his accompanying letter, Prof. Waliszewski (a non-SDA) urged me to accept the invitation and asked

permission to translate my Sabbath books into Polish and Russian. On such short notice and with such limited information about the actual location of the meeting, it was impossible for me to attend. My absence from the meeting does not detract from the fact that 1500 leaders of Polish Unity Brethren Church in Poland and Western Ukraine came together to establish a new Sabbathkeeping Church of God.

More recently I received a letter (October 3, 1997) from Pastor Glen Howard, of the International Church of Budapest in Hungary. Pastor Howard is apparently an American missionary sponsored by a Sundaykeeping denomination, as indicated by his fluent English and ability to pay for my books with a check drawn on an American bank.

In his letter, Pastor Howard informed me that he has read and shared with his congregations my two Sabbath books **FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY** and **THE SABBATH IN THE NEW TESTAMENT**. According to the letter, “several people in our congregation have become quite interested in the subject of the Sabbath and would like to get a copy of these books. . . .Do you have a special price for churches of mission organizations?” Rest assured that I was delighted to ship to them a case of my Sabbath books. It is heart-warming for me to receive letters almost every week from individuals and church leaders informing me that through the printed page the Lord has brought conviction to their minds as to the biblical validity and value of Sabbathkeeping for their Christian lives.

Conclusion. The foregoing fragmentary report on the rediscovery of the Sabbath by scholars, church leaders, and religious groups known to me hardly does justice to the swelling interest in the Sabbath on the part of many other religious groups that have not been mentioned.

This partial report suffices to show that interest in the Sabbath has hardly been suppressed by the crossfire of controversy. The truth is that we are experiencing today a swelling interest for Sabbath. Christians of all persuasions are rediscovering that the Sabbath is indeed “a gift waiting to be unwrapped.”³³ Many today are unwrapping this gift by accepting God’s invitation to stop their work on the Sabbath day in order to allow Him to enrich their lives with a larger measure of His divine presence, peace, and rest. Many more can receive the gift of the Sabbath if those of us who experience weekly the

blessings of this divine gift will share with others the benefits this day brings to our lives.

PART 3

THE SABBATH AS CHRIST’S REST FOR HUMAN RESTLESSNESS

Rediscovering the Sabbath is not just a matter of accepting the Sabbath commandment by resting and worshipping on the seventh day. It also involves learning how through the Sabbath, we can enter into God’s rest (Heb 4:10). Our tension-filled and restless lives today more than ever before need the rest and renewal the Sabbath is designed to provide. In this, the conclusion of this study, it is well for us to reflect on how the Sabbath can enable us to experience the awareness of Christ’s presence, peace, and rest in our lives. So far I have endeavored to reaffirm the *validity* of the principle and practice of Sabbathkeeping by refuting the major attacks launched against this divine institution. At this juncture, by way of conclusion, I would like to focus on the physical and spiritual *value* of the Sabbath for our lives.

The Search for Inner Rest and Release. We live in a tension-filled and restless society where many people try to work off tension by joining athletic clubs, and meditation groups, or by taking tranquilizers, drugs, and alcohol. Some seek release from their tension by taking vacations to some fantasy island. Experience tells us, however, that even fabulous vacations or magic pills provide at best only a temporary relief and not a permanent quieting of inner tension and restlessness.

True rest is not to be found in *places* or through *pills*, but rather in the right relationship with a *Person*, the Person of the Savior who says: “Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28, NIV). Perfect rest and peace are not a human achievement but a divine gift. It is an experience that comes to us when we allow Christ to harmonize our lives (“I will give you rest”—Matt. 11:28).

Perfect rest does not come about accidentally but is the result of an harmonious accord of the physical, mental, and spiritual components of our being. Can we by ourselves harmonize these three, that is, our body, mind and soul? We can stretch our tired body on a bed, but if our mind and soul are troubled, we have not rest but agitation, tension, or even nightmares. As the various components of an orchestra need the direction of a skilful *maestro* to blend them into harmonious music, so

the physical, mental and spiritual components of our being need the direction of our supreme *Master* in order for us to experience harmonious rest and peace.

Augustine expresses this truth eloquently in the opening paragraph of his autobiography entitled **CONFESSIONS**: “Thou hast made us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee.” How can we enable Christ to harmonize and quiet our restless lives? Our study shows that God gave mankind before and after the Fall a vital institution, the Sabbath day—a day specifically designed to free us from our daily work in order to allow God to work more fully and freely in our lives (Heb 4:10).

To grasp more fully this important function of the Sabbath, we now consider, by way of conclusion, seven significant ways in which proper Sabbathkeeping enables the Savior to bring rest and peace to our restless lives.

(1) *The Rest of Creation*

The Sabbath brings Christ’s rest to our souls by constantly reassuring us that our lives have meaning, value, and hope because they are rooted in God from creation to eternity. We may call this “Christ’s creation rest” for the human soul. It is the rest that Christ brings to those thinking persons who are searching for meaning and value in their lives—to those who wonder if their existence as well as that of the whole cosmos is the result of *chance* or of *choice*, that is, of a *merciless fate* or of a *merciful God*. To these persons, through the Sabbath, Christ offers His restful assurance that their ancestral roots are good because they are rooted in God Himself (Gen 1:26-27) and that their existence has value because it is not the product of chance but of a personal creation and redemption by a loving God.

This reassuring message of the Sabbath is found in the creation story where on and through the seventh day God declares His creation “finished” and “done.” Three verbs characterize God’s assessment of His creation on the seventh day as being fully “done” (repeated thrice), “finished,” or “created” (Gen 2:2-3). Another three verbs describe how God celebrated His magnificent accomplishments: “He rested . . . blessed . . . and hallowed” the seventh day. These verbs emphasize that on and through the seventh day God proclaimed the good news that His creation was “finished” and fully “done.” To dramatize the importance of such glad tidings, twice we are told in Genesis 2:2-3 that God “rested” in

recognition of the fact that everything was very good and there was no need of further improvement.

The Sabbath invites believers to renew their faith in the perfect Creator by delighting in the beauty of His creation. To celebrate God’s perfect creation on the Sabbath means to experience Christ’s rest of creation. It means to rejoice in the divine assurance that human existence, in spite of its apparent futility and tragedy, has value because it proceeds from God and moves toward a glorious divine destiny.

Augustine expresses this truth poetically: “Thy resting on the seventh day after the completion of Thy works foretells us through the voice of Thy Book that we also, after completing our works through Thy generosity, in the Sabbath of eternal life shall rest in Thee.”³⁴ To celebrate the Sabbath in this restless world means to experience a foretaste of the future rest and peace that awaits God’s people in the world to come; it means to rest in the assurance that “he who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ” (Phil 1:6).

Resting as if All Work Were Done. To celebrate the completion and perfection of God’s original creation it is important to rest on the Sabbath as if all our work were done. This may sound unrealistic since we often find ourselves at the end of a work week frustrated over unfinished tasks. In spite of our best efforts, we often accomplish during the six days only part of what we set out to do.

A vital function of the Sabbath is to give a sense of “completeness” to our incomplete work and life. A rabbinical comment on Exodus 20:9 (“Six days you shall labor, and do all your work”) hints at this function of the Sabbath: “Is it possible for a human being to do all his work in six days? Does not our work always remain incomplete? What the verse means to convey is: Rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done. Another interpretation: *Rest even from the thought of labor.*”³⁵

True, the Sabbath often seems to arrive earlier than expected. We may feel disappointed with ourselves because of unfinished tasks. This is a forceful reminder of our human finiteness and limitations. By enabling us to detach ourselves from our daily tasks, the Sabbath gives a sense of completion to the work of the previous six days and to life itself. In some weeks, the result of our labor seems greater than in others, but it is a fact that whether our best efforts have produced much or little,

during each Sabbath God invites us to celebrate His creative and redemptive accomplishments on our behalf by entering into His Sabbath rest. He invites us to interrupt our daily routine and rest as if all our work were done in order that we may enter into the joys of His “finished” creation and salvation (Gen. 2:2; John 19:30).

It would be impossible on the Sabbath to praise God for His marvelous accomplishments while living under a deep sense of personal failure and frustration because of work that remains undone. Thus, on and through the Sabbath, God invites us to view our work in the light of His accomplishments. He tells us, “Whether your hard work has produced little or much, rest on the Sabbath as if all your work were done, because My grace is sufficient for you.” The sense of completeness that the celebration of the Sabbath brings to our life gives meaning and direction to what otherwise would be a continuous, meaningless, and linear existence.

Renewing Faith in a Perfect Creator. We celebrate on the Sabbath the perfection of God’s original creation by renewing our faith in God as our perfect Creator. Faith in God as Creator is the cornerstone of Christian beliefs. The first article of the “Apostles’ Creed” which most Christians recite and/or accept, states: “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and *earth*—*creatorem caeli et terrae*.” Such a belief is implied in the opening declaration of the Bible: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth” (Gen 1:1).

To celebrate the Sabbath means to subscribe to this fundamental biblical teaching by confessing, not merely with words but also with corresponding actions, belief in God as the perfect Creator. It means to recognize that the existence of this world itself is an absolute gift from God. George Elliott eloquently writes: “Against atheism, which denies the existence of a personal God; against materialism, which denies that this visible universe has its roots in the unseen; and against secularism, which denies the need to worship, the Sabbath is an eternal witness. It symbolically commemorates that creative power which spoke all things into being, the wisdom which ordered their adaptations and harmony, and the love which made, as well as pronounced, all ‘very good.’ It is set as the perpetual guardian of man against that spiritual infirmity which has everywhere led him to a denial of the God who made him, or to the degradation of that God into a creature made with his own hands.”³⁶

Skepticism can be an outgrowth of forgetfulness. A person who neglects the Sabbath, the memorial of creation, is liable to forget and become skeptical about the God of creation. This can be true also in human relationships. I was engaged to be married for four years, which to me seemed like an eternity because much of the time my fiancée and I were separated by an ocean. During the prolonged separation, I was tempted to forget and to doubt who my fiancée was and how much she loved me. How did I overcome my incipient skepticism? I would take time to read and reread her loving letters and to look at her pictures. That helped me to overcome my incipient skepticism and to renew my commitment to her. In a similar fashion the Sabbath provides a weekly opportunity to overcome any incipient skepticism by inviting us to “remember” God as our perfect Creator.

Through the Sabbath, God invites us week after week to hear and to celebrate His perfect creation by contemplating His handiwork and thus renewing our faith in Him as our perfect Creator. Because this vital function of the Sabbath meets a continuing human need—greater today than ever before—no Sabbath discontinuance can ever be sanctioned or ever be legitimately contemplated. Thus, any human attempt to invest another day of the week with the symbolic-memorial function of the creation-Sabbath would mean to disregard the event for which the day stands.

Delighting in God’s Creation. A tangible way in which we renew our faith in God as our perfect Creator on the Sabbath is by taking delight in the beauty of His creation. The Sabbath invites us not to prostitute the world but to delight in its beauty. It invites us to look above and beyond the cloud of sin and suffering that darkens our world and recapture in thought the astonishment, the joy, and the admiration experienced by the first human pair.

The Sabbath offers us the opportunity to look at the world through the window of eternity. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the Sabbath has been regarded as a day of joy and jubilation. Isaiah calls the Sabbath “a delight,” and a day to “take delight in the Lord” (Is 58:13-14). To ensure the festive atmosphere of the Sabbath, the Jews prepared themselves for the event with special clothing, meals, and a proper frame of mind. No fasting was permitted and even the seven-day mourning period was to be interrupted.³⁷

Everything is more beautiful and delightful on the Sabbath. The divine services seem richer, the people friendlier, the food more delicious, ladies, gentlemen, and children more beautiful internally and externally. The reason is that the Sabbath offers not only the time but also the spiritual resources to perceptibly enjoy God, people, and things. By renewing faith in a perfect Creator and Redeemer, the Sabbath enables the believer to view things not merely as they are but as they must have been originally and as they ultimately will be again. It is like putting on for 24 hours a pair of spectacles that make flat pictures look three-dimensional.

Christians who love the Lord of the Sabbath find the Sabbath to be a day of joyful celebration of God's marvelous accomplishments in the world and in their personal life. When Friday evening comes, they gratefully say: "Thank God it is Sabbath!" They rejoice at the thought that another Sabbath has come—a day to taste and know that the Lord is good; a day to thank God for the accomplishments of a week that is past; a day to renew one's faith in and commitment to the perfect Creator and Savior; a day to sing the Psalmist's Sabbath song, "Thou, O Lord, hast made me glad by thy work; at the works of thy hands I sing for joy. How great are thy works, O Lord!" (Ps 92:4-5— A Song for the Sabbath).

(2) *The Rest of Divine Presence*

Proper Sabbathkeeping brings Christ's rest to our lives by enabling us to experience the awareness of His divine presence. It is Christ's presence that brought stillness to the stormy lake of Galilee (Matt 8:23-27) and it is also the assurance of His presence that brings peace and stillness to troubled lives. This is basically the meaning of the holiness of the Sabbath which is frequently stated in the Bible.

We have found that the holiness of the Sabbath consists in the special manifestation of God's presence through this day in the life of His people. Believers who on the Sabbath lay aside their secular concerns, who turn off their receivers to the many distracting voices in order to tune in and listen to the voice of God, experience in a real sense the spiritual presence of Christ. The heightened sense of the nearness of Christ's presence experienced on the Sabbath fills the soul with joy, peace, and rest.

Relationships, if they are to survive, need to be cultivated. This is true both at a human and a human-divine level. I vividly recall the A, B, C privilege-system that governed the social relationships among students of

the opposite sex at Newbold College, England, where I received my college education. A couple with an "A" status was entitled to a weekly encounter of about one hour in a designated lounge. However, those couples who qualified for a "B" or a "C" privilege could officially meet only biweekly or monthly. Frankly, I did my best to maintain the "A" status because I viewed those brief weekly encounters with my fiancée as indispensable to the survival of our relationship.

The Sabbath is in a sense a special weekly encounter with our Creator-Redeemer. This encounter lasts not merely *one hour* but a *whole day*. It is a sobering thought that to enter into the holy Sabbath day means in a special sense to enter into the spiritual presence and communion of the Lord. Believers who cultivate Christ's presence during the Sabbath time and activities experience His rest and peace every day of their lives.

An Experience of God's Presence. I vividly recall the many Sabbaths I spent in the town of Fano, Italy, worshipping God alone in the seclusion of my room or out in nature. At that time I was a teenager selling Christian literature during the summer to earn a scholarship. During the weekdays, I had to face considerable hostility from various quarters—from the local religious and civil authorities who constantly threatened to punish me for distributing unauthorized literature; from superstitious customers who feared being contaminated by the unendorsed literature I was selling; and from my relatives who gave me hospitality but viewed me as a heretic to be rescued from hellfire.

When Friday night arrived, I rejoiced at the thought that for one day I could forget the hostile world around me and enter into the peace of God's presence. Since no fellow believers lived in the immediate area, I would worship God alone, but not lonely, in the privacy of my room or in an open field. So the Sabbath has been for me, as for countless believers throughout history, a truly portable sanctuary—a day to forget human misery through the experience of the closeness of God's presence.

The experience of God's presence on the Sabbath reminds us of the purpose of Christ's coming into this world to become "Emmanuel, God with us." The Incarnation fulfills blessing and sanctification of the Sabbath, which, we have seen, consist in God's assurance to His creatures of abundant life through His presence. What God promised to His creation by blessing and

sanctifying the Sabbath, He fulfilled by sending Christ into this world to become “Emmanuel—God with us.”

“How often have we heard,” writes Herbert W. Richardson, “that Jesus Christ abolished the Sabbath so that men may be truly free! But this suggestion is sheer theological nonsense. The work of Jesus Christ cannot contradict the purpose for which God created the world. To assert such a contradiction, by explicitly or implicitly opposing the Sabbath, is to reiterate the old Gnostic claim that the God of the Old Testament and the God of the New Testament are two different ‘Gods.’”³⁸

Richardson continues by rightly affirming that “the Sabbath Day was created by God, so that He Himself might enter into the world and sanctify it by His personal presence.”³⁹ God’s sanctification of the Sabbath represents a most telling revelation of God’s concern for this world. It tells that God so loved this world, not only by entering into the limitation of *human time* on the seventh day of creation to bless this world with His Holy presence, but also by entering into the limitations of *human flesh* at the Incarnation to become again “Emmanuel—God with us.”

(3) *The Rest from Competition*

True Sabbathkeeping brings Christ’s rest to our lives by releasing us from the pressure to produce and achieve. The pressure that our competitive society exerts on us can cause untold frustration. Competition can dishearten, dehumanize, and demoralize a person. It can turn friends into foes.

In order to keep up with the Joneses, some Christians today, like the Israelites of old, choose to “moonlight” on the Sabbath (Ex 16:27), hoping to secure added income and goods. But Scripture points to the senselessness of such an effort when it pointedly says “they found none” (Ex 16:27). That is to say, one misses obtaining both the material and the spiritual manna by doing extra work on the Sabbath, consequently finding restlessness and dissatisfaction.

The Sabbath and Gratefulness. The Sabbath teaches our greedy hearts to be grateful—to stop for one day looking for more and to start instead to gratefully acknowledge the blessings received. A person who learns gratitude experiences inner peace, inasmuch as a grateful heart is the abiding place of Christ and of His peace.

The Sabbath rest teaches that the chief end of life is not, as advocated by Marxism, to work to transform nature, but to rest to enjoy God’s presence and creation. The Sabbath rest also teaches freedom from things. One of the most difficult lessons to learn is how to have things without becoming addicted to them—how to live with people without losing one’s independence. On the Sabbath, by abstaining from the production or purchase of goods, we learn detachment and independence from matter and attachment to and dependence on the Spirit.

By freeing us from work, the Sabbath makes us free for God. It invites us, to use Aquinas’ happy expression, to have “a day of vacation with God”—*ad vacandum divinis*.⁴⁰ How sour the weekdays would be without the Sabbath vacation with God and fellow beings! Weekdays without the Sabbath are like spaghetti without sauce or food without salt. As a spicy sauce gives gusto to spaghetti, so a joyful Sabbath radiates a festive gleam to every day of the week.

By restricting temporarily our productivity, the Sabbath teaches us not to compete but to commune with one another. It teaches us to view fellow beings not *quantitatively* but *qualitatively*, that is, not in terms of their income but in terms of their human worth. If Mr. Jones lives on social security, during the week we may be tempted to think of him in terms of his small income. On the Sabbath, however, as we worship and fellowship with Mr. Jones, we appreciate not the little that he makes but the much that he offers to the church and community through his Christian witness and example.

By releasing us from the pressure of competition and production, the Sabbath enables us to appreciate more fully the human values of people and the beauty of things. This free and fuller appreciation of God, people, and things brings joy, harmony, and rest to our lives.

(4) *The Rest of Belonging*

Genuine Sabbathkeeping brings Christ’s rest to our lives by reassuring us of our belonging to Him. At the root of much human restlessness is the sense of alienation and estrangement. The sense of not-belonging to anyone or anything will cause a person to feel bitter, insecure, and restless. On the contrary, in a relationship of mutual belonging, one experiences love, identity, security, and rest. To enable human beings to conceptualize and experience a belonging relationship with Him, God has given helpful signs and symbols such as the rainbow, the

circumcision, the Passover lamb and blood, the bread and wine, and the Sabbath.

The Sabbath occupies a unique place among these various God-given covenant signs or symbols, because it has functioned as the symbol *par excellence* of the divine election and mission of God's people. It is unique in its *origin*, because it is the first sign given by God to reveal His desire to fellowship with His creatures. It is unique in its *survival*, because it has survived not only the Fall but also the Flood, the Egyptian slavery, the Babylonian exile, the Roman anti-Sabbath legislation, the French and Russian temporary introduction of the ten-day week, blank-day calendar proposals (disrupting the weekly cycle), antinomianism, and modern secularism. The day still stands for God's people as the symbol of God's gracious provision of salvation and of belonging to Him.

Divine Ownership. The Sabbath constantly reminds believers of their belonging to God, because it is the seal of divine ownership. The meaning of ownership is explicitly expressed both in the Fourth Commandment and in its sister institutions, the sabbatical and the jubilee years. In the Sabbath Commandment, believers are invited to "remember" that "in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea and all that is in them (Ex 20:11; 31:17). As Creator, God is the only legitimate Owner of this world. In the sabbatical and jubilee years, the Israelites were enjoined to relinquish the use of the land and to liberate their fellow beings from poverty and bondage (Lev 25; Deut 15:1-18) in order to acknowledge that Yahweh is the only rightful owner of the land ("The land is mine and you are but aliens and my tenants"—Lev 25:23, NIV).

As the symbol of divine ownership, the Sabbath enables believers to realize constantly and effectively that this world and their very lives belong to God. This recognition of God's ownership of one's life is indispensable for a total commitment and belonging to God. This is true also at the human level. Husband and wife truly belong to each other when they are willing to say to each other, "I am yours and you are mine."

One of the pitfalls of a life style characterized by husbands, wives, and children working to earn separate incomes (often irrespective of need) is the false sense of independence and separate ownership it fosters. It often leads a member of the family to say: "This is my money, my car, my house. I have worked for it, so I am free to do with it whatever I wish." This deceptive sense of

ownership, which sometimes strains and even destroys human relationships, also can weaken the very connection between a person and God. The wealth and abundance of goods which a person may acquire as a result of diligent work can easily induce a false sense of autonomy and independence from God.

Sign of Dependency upon God. Are not autonomy and independence—living one's own life without any regard to God—the essence of a sinful life? The Sabbath, symbol of divine creatorship and ownership, is designed to aid the believer in overcoming any incipient feeling of self-sufficiency. As the first couple observed Sabbath on their first full day of life, standing before their Creator empty-handed, acknowledging their indebtedness for all, so believers who on the Sabbath cease from their own work acknowledge their indebtedness and dependency upon the workings of God.

To observe the Sabbath means to confess God as Creator and Owner of all life and wealth. It means to recognize that God's total claim over one's life is expressed by consecrating the Sabbath time to God. Ownership implies boundaries; there is to be no trespassing. God has chosen to set in time the boundaries of His dominion. Believers who accept God's claim over the last day of the week—the Sabbath—accepts God's claim over their whole lives and world. Those who accept this particular sign of God's ownership, stopping their work on the Sabbath in order to allow God to work in them, demonstrate and experiences a total belonging to God.

Divine Commitment. The Sabbath reminds us of our belonging to God because it effectively expresses the mutual commitment that binds God and His people. A mutual belonging relationship can endure only if both parties remember and honor their respective obligations. The Sabbath expresses both divine and human commitments.

The Sabbath stands first of all for divine commitment. God's last creative act was not the fashioning of Adam and Eve but the creation of *His rest* for mankind (Gen 2:2-3). Such a divine rest has a message for the creation as a whole as well as for human beings in particular. With regard to creation, as noted in Chapter 2 of **THE SABBATH IN CRISIS**, God's rest signifies His satisfaction over the completion and perfection of His creation. With regard to humanity, God's rest symbolizes His availability to His creatures.

By taking “time out” on the first Sabbath to bless the first couple with His holy presence, God committed Himself to be available for His creatures. As aptly expressed by A. Martin, “The promise to which God commits Himself through the Sabbath is to have time for mankind. God is not an idea but a Person who assures all creation of His presence. The Sabbath is the sign of this promise. However, this is not limited solely to the Sabbath time. In the same way as Christ’s presence is not limited to the space occupied by the bread, so the Sabbath reminds mankind of the permanence of God’s [presence].”⁴¹

This divine commitment becomes explicit in the covenant relationship in which the Sabbath is presented as God’s assurance of His sanctifying presence among His people (Ex. 31:13; Ezek. 20:12). Human disobedience did not alter God’s original commitment. On the contrary, when the estrangement caused by sin occurred, God through the Sabbath guaranteed His total commitment to restore the broken relationship.

Human Commitment. The Sabbath stands not only for divine but also for human commitment. It signifies not only “that I, the Lord, sanctify you” but also that “you shall keep my Sabbaths” (Ex 31:13). By reassuring human beings that God is available and “working until now” (John 5:17) to accomplish the ultimate restoration of this world to His eternal fellowship, the Sabbath invites the believer to assume his responsibility by making himself available for God. By accepting God’s invitation to keep the Sabbath with Him, the believer enters into a special relationship with God.

The free offering of time to God is a supreme act of worship because it means acknowledging God with the very essence of human life: time. Life is time. When “time is up” life ceases to be. The offering of the Sabbath time to God enables believers to acknowledge that their whole life, not just one-seventh, belongs to God. It represents the Christians’ response to God’s claim on their lives. By bringing all routine work to a halt for one day, Christians act out their commitment to the Lord.

Sabbath, then, on the one hand, symbolizes God’s commitment to be available for His creatures. On the other hand, Sabbathkeeping expresses the believers’ acceptance of the Creator and Redeemer’s claim upon their lives. In a sense, the Sabbath is the insignia of the believer, a sort of badge worn at God’s request in order to recall God’s loyalty to us and our loyalty to God. It is a

placard we carry to show the world what we stand for and whom we serve.

During the week a person may feel frustrated by a sense of anonymity. “Who am I?” he may ask, as he lives and moves among the crowd. The answer that often echoes back is, “You are a cog in a machine and a number in the computer.” On the Sabbath, the answer is different. The Christian hears the Lord saying, “You may know that I, the Lord, sanctify you” (Ex 31:13).

Being the symbol of divine ownership and sanctification, the Sabbath assures believers of their own divine election and sanctification. By renewing the sense of belonging to our Creator-Redeemer, the Sabbath restores to us a sense of human dignity, identity, peace, and rest to our lives.

(5) The Rest from Social Tensions

True Sabbathkeeping enables us to experience Christ’s rest by breaking down social, racial, and cultural barriers. The inability or unwillingness to appreciate and accept another person’s skin color, culture, language, or social status is a major cause of much unrest, hate, and tension in our contemporary society.

After the Fall, an important function of the Sabbath has been to teach equality and respect for every member of the human society. Every seven days, seven years (sabbatical year), and seven weeks of years (jubilee year), all persons, beasts and property were to become free before God. Genuine freedom leads to equality.

The uneven divisions of Hebrew society leveled out as the Sabbath began. Samuel H. Dresner rightly notes that the equalizing function of the Sabbath has seldom been recognized. “Although one Jew may have peddled onions and another may have owned great forests of lumber, on the Sabbath all were equal, all were kings: all welcomed the Sabbath Queen, all chanted the *Kiddush*, all basked in the glory of the seventh day. . . . On the Sabbath there were neither banker nor clerk, neither farmer nor hired-hand, neither rich nor poor. There were only Jews hallowing the Sabbath.”⁴²

It is noteworthy that Isaiah reassures the outcasts of Israel, specifically the eunuchs and the foreigners of whom the Assyrian and Babylonian wars had produced a great number, that by observing the Sabbath they would share in the blessings of God’s covenant people, “for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples” (Is 56:1-7).

Many social injustices could have been avoided in the ancient and modern society if the concern for human rights expressed by the Sabbath (and its sister institutions) had always been understood and practiced. The Sabbath forces upon us the important issues of freedom and humanitarian concern for all, from our son to our servant (Ex 20:10; 23:12; Deut 5:14). By placing such issues before us at the moment of worship—the moment when we are truest to ourselves—the Sabbath cannot leave us insensitive toward the suffering or social injustices experienced by others.

It is impossible on the Sabbath to celebrate Creation and Redemption while hating those whom God has created and redeemed through His Son. True Sabbathkeeping demands that we acknowledge the Fatherhood of God by accepting and strengthening the brotherhood of mankind.

The bond of fellowship which the Sabbath establishes through its worship, fellowship, and humanitarian services influences by reflex our social relationships during the week. To accept on the Sabbath those who belong to ethnic minorities or to a lower social status as brothers and sisters in Christ demands that we treat them as such during the weekdays as well. It would be a denial of the human values and experience of the Sabbath if one were to exploit or detest during the week those whom the Sabbath teaches us to respect and love as God's creatures.

By teaching us to accept and respect every person, whether rich or poor, black or white, as human beings created and redeemed by the Lord, the Sabbath breaks down and equalizes those social, racial, and cultural barriers which cause much tension and unrest in our society and, consequently, makes it possible for the peace of Christ to dwell in our hearts.

(6) The Rest of Redemption

A sixth way in which Sabbathkeeping brings Christ's rest to our lives is by enabling us to experience through the physical rest the greater blessings of divine rest and peace of salvation. The relationship between the Sabbath rest and Christ's redemption-rest was examined in chapter 4 of **THE SABBATH IN CRISIS**. There we saw that from the symbol of God's initial entrance into *human time*, the Sabbath became after the Fall the symbol of God's promise to enter *human flesh* to become "Emmanuel—God with us."

The rest and liberation from the hardship of work and from social inequalities which both the weekly and annual Sabbaths granted to all the members of the Hebrew society was understood not merely as a commemoration of the past Exodus deliverance (Deut 5:15), but also a prefiguration of the future redemption-rest to be brought by the Messiah. Christ fulfilled these Old Testament Messianic expectations typified by the Sabbath (cf. Luke 4:21) by identifying His redemptive mission with the release and redemption of the Sabbath, thus making the day the fitting vehicle through which to experience His rest of salvation.

It was on a Sabbath day that, according to Luke 4:16-21, Christ inaugurated His public ministry in the synagogue of Nazareth by quoting a passage from Isaiah 61:1-2 and by claiming emphatically to be the fulfillment of the sabbatical liberation announced in that passage. In His subsequent ministry, Christ substantiated this claim by revealing His redemptive mission especially through His Sabbath healing and teaching ministry (cf. Luke 13:16; Matt 12:5-6; John 5:17; 7:22-23).

Finally, it was on that historic holy Sabbath that Christ completed His redemptive mission ("It is finished"—John 19:30) by resting in the tomb (Luke 23:54-56). Christ's Sabbath rest in the tomb reveals the depth of God's love for His creatures. It tells us that in order to give them life, He was willing to experience not only the limitation of *human time* at creation but also the suffering, agony, and death of *human flesh* during the Incarnation.

In the light of the Cross, the Sabbath is the weekly celebration and jubilation of a liberated people. It memorializes not only God's creative but also His redemptive accomplishments for mankind. Thus, "the Sabbath rest that remains for the people of God" (Heb 4:9) is not only a physical cessation from work to commemorate God's perfect creation, but also a spiritual entering into God's rest (Heb 4:10) made possible through Christ's complete redemption. The physical act of resting becomes the means through which believers experience spiritual rest. We cease from our daily work on the Sabbath to allow God to work in us more freely and fully, and to bring to our lives His rest of forgiveness and salvation.

(7) The Rest of Service

The Sabbath brings Christ's rest to our lives by providing time and opportunities for service. Inner peace and rest are to be found not in *self-centered relaxation* but rather

in God and *other-centered service*. The Sabbath provides the time and the reasons for serving God, ourselves, and others. Let us look at each of them.

The Sabbath as Service to God. Repeatedly, Scripture reminds us that the seventh day is a Sabbath of solemn rest, holy to the Lord (see Ex 31:15; 16:23; 20:10; Lev 23:3; Mark 2:28). Obviously, we serve God every day, but our everyday service to God differs from the Sabbath service. During the week we offer to God what may be called the *Martha type of service* in which we acknowledge our Savior while serving an employer and meeting the many demands of life.

On the Sabbath, however, we offer to God what may be called the *Mary type of service* in which we desist from gainful employment and from secular pursuits in order to fully and wholly honor our Savior. The deliberate act of resting on the Sabbath for God is a most meaningful act of worship because it signifies our total response to God. It is an act of worship that is not exhausted in the *one-hour* attendance at the worship service but lasts for *twenty-four hours*.

To appreciate the profound religious significance of the Sabbath rest as service to God, we need to remember that our life is a measure of time, and the way we spend our time is indicative of our priorities. We have no time for those toward whom we feel indifferent, but we find time for those whom we love. To be willing on the seventh day to withdraw from the world of things in order to meet the invisible God in the quietness of our souls means to show in a tangible way our love, loyalty, and devotion to God. It means being willing to tune out the hundreds of voices and noises that clamor for attention in order to tune in our souls to God and to hear His voice. It means not merely sandwiching in one hour of worship for God in a hectic day spent seeking selfish pleasure or profit, but rather serving God wholly during the Sabbath; it means offering to God not only lip service but the service of our total being.

The Sabbath as Service to Ourselves. Sabbathkeeping means not only service to God but also service to ourselves. The very service we offer God on the Sabbath by resting and worshiping Him is designed not to add strength or power to God but to enable God to strengthen and empower our personal lives.

God does not need our Sabbath rest and worship, nor does He need our weekday work. What He wants is a receptive heart, mind, and soul willing to receive and

experience His peace and rest that only can fulfill the deepest longing of our hearts. On the Sabbath we can experience divine peace and rest by taking time to meditate in the climate of stillness and free reflection the day provides.

According to some social analysts, the lack of reflection is a fundamental cause of our restless culture. Many today live intensely active, restless lives without understanding their true selves; thus, they ever sense an inner emptiness and disillusionment. Some often go from one round of activities to another in an attempt to find peace and joy by forgetting their inner tensions. But inner peace and harmony are to be found not in forgetting one selves by doing an endless round of activities but rather in discovering ourselves by being still.

The psalmist expresses this truth eloquently when he says: "Be still, and know that I am God" (Ps 46:10). For many of us, it is difficult to "be still" during the week. The Sabbath, however, by releasing us from the pressure of our daily work, provides us with time and opportunities to restore order and harmony to our fragmented lives. It enables us to restore equilibrium between our bodies and our souls, between the material and spiritual components of our being.

During the week as we work to produce, to sell, to buy, and to enjoy *things*, we tend to become materially conscious, to view our *material wants* as more important than our *spiritual needs*. Our bodies seem to become more important than our souls. The Sabbath is designed to restore the equilibrium between our bodies and our souls.

The story is told of some African workers who were hired to carry pieces of heavy equipment on their backs to a remote post in the interior of Africa. After several days of marching, one day they refused to pick up their burdens and go any further. They sat by the side of the road turning a deaf ear to the appeals of the man in charge. Exasperated, the leader of the expedition asked them, "But why don't you want to go on?" One of the workers replied, "Sir, we are waiting for our souls to catch up with our bodies."

This story well illustrates the function of the Sabbath to give a chance to our souls to catch up with our bodies—to give a change to our souls, through worship and meditation, to be enriched with new moral and spiritual values. This spiritual renewal that comes to us on the Sabbath through worship and meditation enables us to

turn a new page in our life, to start a new week with a fresh provision of divine wisdom and grace.

The Sabbath as Service to Others. The Sabbath provides precious opportunities to serve not only God and ourselves but also others. After helping us to find God and ourselves, the Sabbath helps us to reach out to others. After renewing us with a fresh understanding and experience of God's creative and redemptive love, the Sabbath challenges us to reach out to others, to respond to human needs.

To help us to remember others, the Fourth Commandment gives quite an inclusive list of persons to be remembered on the Sabbath. The list goes from the son to the manservant, from the daughter to the maidservant, and includes also the sojourner and the animals. This humanitarian function of the Sabbath tends to be neglected. We prefer to think of the Sabbath in terms of service to ourselves rather than service to others. Thus, Christ took pains through His Sabbath teaching and ministry to clarify and emphasize this function of the Sabbath commandment.

The Savior proclaimed the Sabbath to be a day "to do good" (Matt 12:12, NIV), "to save" (Mark 3:4), to liberate people from physical and spiritual bonds (Luke 13:12)—a day to show mercy rather than religiosity (Matt 12:7,8). Through His Sabbath ministry, Jesus taught that the Sabbath is not rules to obey, but people to love; it is the day to share God's blessing with others.

During the week, many pressures may cause us to neglect needy persons. On the Sabbath, as we celebrate God's creative and redemptive love, we are motivated to share our concern and friendship with the needy. The service we render on the Sabbath to needy persons not only honors God but also enriches our lives with a sense of joy and satisfaction.

The unique opportunities the Sabbath provides to serve God by consecrating our time to Him; to serve ourselves by experiencing physical, moral, and spiritual renewal; and to serve others make it possible to experience a larger measure of the Savior's rest in our lives.

Conclusion

At a time when the Sabbath has come under the crossfire of controversy—being attacked not only by Sundaykeepers but also by some former Sabbatarians—it is reassuring to know that there are many Christians

who are rediscovering the Sabbath as God's gift to the human family.

Our survey has shown that an increasing number of scholars, religious organizations, and Christians in general are rediscovering the meaning and value of the Sabbath for their lives. These Christians are discovering that the values of the Sabbath as a day for spiritual, physical, moral, and social renewal are essential for revitalizing the religious experience of millions of Christians today.

Rediscovering the Sabbath in this cosmic age provides the basis for a cosmic faith, a faith which embraces and unites creation, redemption, and final restoration; the past, the present, and the future; man, nature, and God; this world and the world to come. It is a faith that recognizes God's dominion over the whole creation and human life by consecrating to Him the seventh day; a faith that fulfills the believer's true destiny in time and eternity; a faith that allows the Savior to enrich our lives with a larger measure of His presence, peace, and rest.

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