

The Sabbath A Sign Of Belonging

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

The last newsletter "What is a Christian Lifestyle?" (No. 71) generated by far more responses than any previous Bible study. I posted that newsletter late in the evening before going to bed and by the time I opened my mail box in the morning there were over 200 responses. I said: "MAMMA MIA! Don't people sleep at night!" Thank you for taking time to read these newsletters even in the middle of the night, and for emailing me your comments.

Words fail to express my heartfelt gratitude for the many positive comments and messages of encouragement received. It is reassuring to know that there are many fellow believers who share their same concerns about the erosion of church standards. Thank you for encouraging me to write a book on "THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE." By God's grace, I plan to work on this project in the coming months. The objective of this research is not to accuse and condemn immature fellow believers. God has not called us to judge the shortcomings of others, but to live out and proclaim the moral principles He has revealed.

Regarding the question of people coming to church with revealing or casual clothes, few of the messages received suggest that the pastor or the church members have no business to tell people how to dress for church. Two major reasons were given. First, some feel that it is the work of the Holy Spirit to convince people of their wrong doings. The pastor and church members should stay out of it. Second, any form of undesirable criticism can antagonize and alienate people from the church.

There is truth in these two reasons. The problem is that they do not tell the whole truth. For example, the Holy Spirit does not work in isolation. Sometimes it brings conviction through the proclamation of the principles God's Word. At other times the Holy Spirit convicts through the positive example and caring counsel of a fellow believer.

Jesus did not refrain from exposing sin, waiting for the Holy Spirit to convict people of their sins. On the contrary, He spent much of His ministry teaching people how to live out the moral principles of His Word. Much of the Sabbath material of the Gospels presents Jesus challenging prevailing traditions and showing people how to observe the Sabbath— not as rules to obey, but people to love.. It is evident that Jesus was not deterred by the fear of antagonizing or alienating those who resented His exposure of their hypocrisy. Christ chose the Cross rather than political correctness.

REASON FOR THE LATENESS OF THE RECENT NEWSLETTERS

Several subscribers have expressed concerns over the lateness of my newsletters. What used to be a biweekly Bible Study, now is sent out every three or four weeks. Some have interpreted this delay, as an indication that I plan to discontinue this service. This is absolutely untrue. By God grace I plan to continue this service as long as my mind and body function.

At present it is difficult for me to find time to prepare a Bible Study on current issues every two weeks. The reason is that I am traveling now more than ever before. I am solidly booked until December 8 to present seminars across the USA and overseas. This means that I spend about three days of each week on the road, and four days at home.

When I am at home I spend an average of 15 hours a day in my office, processing orders, booking flights, finalizing seminars arrangements, replying the many email messages and letters, and preparing PowerPoint presentation. During the past three months I have spent at least 700/800 hours developing my weekend seminars with PowerPoint slides.

These various responsibilities leave me with little time for creative thinking and writing. This explains the delay in preparing these newsletters. I hope you understand my situation. I have no desire to abandon this service. Hopefully in the coming months the pressure will be less, so that I can devote more time to research and writings.

POWERPOINT SEMINARS

During the past three months I have utilized every spare moment to illustrate each of my seminar lectures with an average of 100 PowerPoint slides. It has been a time consuming project, but the results are very gratifying. People are delighted to be able to visualize by means of Christian art and graphics, the timely truths being presented. I have never received so many expressions of appreciation in my life.

Seeing people so happy to attend this new visual version of my seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle, it is for me a most gratifying experience. On Friday morning, when I fly out with my laptop computer, I feel better equipped than ever before to meet the spiritual needs of our fellow believers and Christian friends. Before I had to rely heavily on my Italian accent and gestures to communicate our message. Now I can count on the help of beautiful pictures and graphic. I use between 100 to 120 slides for each presentation.

Converting my lectures into attractive PowerPoint presentations, is a time consuming effort because it requires long hours to sort through over 10,000 religious pictures to find images that fittingly illustrate the concepts presented. The best reward for such laborious efforts is the smiling faces of the people attending the seminars.

Somehow I wish that I could turn the calendar back 25 years and begin all over again my itinerant ministry with the help of this new technology that gives a visual dimension to our message. Since that is impossible, I can only hope that the Lord will grant me a few more years to proclaim more fully and effectively our timely message.

ART EVANGELISM

Several subscribers have inquired about how to obtain good artistic pictures to use in PowerPoint presentations. One source which I found very helpful has been the HART CLASSIC EDITION, operated by an Adventist organization. They offer two collections. One is called EVANGELISM MEDIA LIBRARY with about 5000 pictures and the other FINE ART MEDIA LIBRARY, with excellent painting by Nathan Greene. I love the painting of Nathan Green. He may well be our best Adventist religious artist at this time. His painting are modern and telling.

To order these two fine collection you can call the HART CLASSIC EDITION at (800) 487-4278 or email at: mail@hartclassics.com Ask to speak with Daniel Houghton, who is responsible for these collections.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the seminars for the months of August and September 2001. Every Sabbath it is a great privilege for me to meet many subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminar. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometime next year. All the weekends for 2001 are now taken. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Lifestyle are now presented with PowerPoint slides which give added realism to our message. If you have attended one of my seminars in the past, you will find the new PowerPoint version to be substantially improved, with hundreds of fine pictures and graphics.

AUGUST 3-4: MIAMI, FLORIDA: MIAMI TEMPLE SDA CHURCH

Location: 9175 SW 44th Street, Miami, Florida 33165

For information call the senior Pastor, Dr. Robert Boggess at (954) 252-3450 or (305) 223-2102

AUGUST 10-11: HOUSTON, TEXAS: WEST HOUSTON SDA CHURCH

Location: 2390 NW Sam Houston Parkway, Houston, Texas 77043

For information call Pastor Ottati at (281) 955-5110

AUGUST 17-18: SPOKANE, WA: SPOKANE VALLEY SDA CHURCH

Location: 1601 S. Sullivan Road, Veradale, Washington 99037

For information call Pastor Stan Hudson at (509) 926-3500 or (509) 926-5866

AUGUST 25: ORLANDO, FLORIDA: WALKER MEMORIAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 1410 W. Avon Boulevard, Avon Park, Florida 33825

For information call Pastor Douglas Jacobs at (863) 453-7110 or (863) 453-6641

AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 1: LOS ANGELES, CA: TEMPLE CITY SDA CHURCH

Location: 9664 Broadway, Temple city, CA 91780

For information call Pastor Ben Del Pozo at (626) 286-5437 or (626) 292-2249

SEPTEMBER 7-8: MIAMI, FLORIDA: LAUDERHILL SDA CHURCH

Location: 4100 NW 11th Court, Lauderhill, Florida 3313

For information call Pastor Leroy Liburd at (954) 485-2529 or (954) 730-7016

SEPTEMBER 14-15: LEXINGTON, SC: COLUMBIA-FIRST SDA CHURCH

Location: 243 Riverchase Way, Lexington, South Carolina 29072

For information call Pastor Tony Cirigliano at (803) 791-4600 or (803) 791-1135

SEPTEMBER 21-22: DENVER, CO: ARVADA SDA CHURCH

Location: 7090 West 64th Avenue, Arvada, CO 80003

For information call Pastor Gordon Anic at (303) 464-9749

SEPTEMBER 28-29: LOMA LINDA, CA: UPLAND INDONESIAN SDA CHURCH

Location: 11100 Cedar Avenue, Bloomington, California

For information call Pastor Fred Macarewa at (909) 423-0406 or (909) 874-7697

THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE

Every week I receive a average of 100 new subscription from people who received an ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER from a friend. Thank you for sharing these Bible studies with your friends. Just let them know that all what they need to do to subscribe is to email me a request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 13,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

A WORD OF INTRODUCTION TO THIS NEWSLETTER

Three of the Sabbath School lessons for the month of July 2001, have dealt with the Sabbath. In view of the fact that I have authored four books on the Sabbath, several subscribers to our newsletters have asked me to share some thoughts on the meaning and relevance of the Sabbath for today. I intended to fulfill this request sooner, but I was unable to do it because of pressing demands on my time.

I apologize for being late in submitting these reflections on why God has chosen the Sabbath as a sign of mutual belonging. The Sabbath School lesson of July 14-20 dealt with this very topic, "The Sabbath: A Sign of our Relationship with God." Unfortunately the lesson fail to address the deeper question of why God has chosen a day, the Sabbath, rather than a place to enable human beings to conceptualize and experience a sense of belonging to Him. You will be pleased to know that this Bible study addresses this very question.

If you find this study stimulating and wish to receive the fuller treatment of my Sabbath research, feel free to call me at (616) 471-2915. We would be glad to mail you the four volumes on the Sabbath for only \$50.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$80.00.

Feel free to download this Bible study and share it with your friend. This is true for all my research. Anyone can use it in any form needed.

THE SABBATH A SIGN OF BELONGING

**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
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The desire to belong to someone is a fundamental human urge. A person who does not belong to anyone or anything is in most cases unmotivated, rebellious, alienated and bitter toward all and everything. On the other hand, it is in a relationship of mutual belonging that a person experiences love, identity and security, which are essential ingredients for healthy growth and adequate motivation.

How do people express mutual belonging? Basically, through words, attitudes and actions. Sometimes gifts are given or exchanged as a token-symbol of mutual devotion and belonging. A young lady remarked to a friend, "What a gorgeous engagement watch your fiancée has given you!" Obviously, that watch served not only to tell the time of day, but also to remind the young lady that she belonged to someone who loved her.

THE COVENANT AS DIVINE-HUMAN BELONGING

The need to express mutual belonging exists both at the human and at the divine-human level. God, in fact, has revealed Himself not as an abstract entity or ideal, but as a personal Being, vitally interested in the well-being and commitment of His creatures.

Various human models have been used during the history of salvation to help human beings conceptualize and experience a meaningful relationship with the invisible God. Some of the significant human models found in the NT are: "forgiveness" which derives from the cancellation of debts; "reconciliation" and "adoption" which are drawn from personal and familial relationship; "redemption" which derives from the emancipation (manumission) of slaves; "justification" which is based on the declaration of guiltlessness by a law court; "sanctification" which derives especially from the sanctuary model, the symbol of God's sanctifying presence.

A prominent human analogy used in the OT, and to a lesser extent in the NT, is the concept of the covenant, a means widely used in the ancient world to regulate social and political relationships beyond natural blood kinship. Basically the covenant was a treaty or a contract between two parties who freely and willingly bound themselves to accept certain mutual obligations.

The Covenant Signs and Symbols

The covenant concept was adopted with radical modifications to express the mutual belonging relationship existing between God and His people. One striking characteristic of the Biblical covenant, not found in the ancient political covenants, is God's emotional appeal to His people. The Lord says, for example: "You have seen what I did to the Egyptians; and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be my own possession among all peoples" (Ex 19:4-5).

Though the covenant was based on God's revealed commandments which the people were expected to observe (Ex. 24:7; Deut. 27 :1), its ultimate function was to reveal God's saving grace in and through His people: "You shall be to me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Ex. 19:6; cf. Deut. 14:1-2; 26:19).

Several covenant signs or symbols are given in the Bible to remind human beings of God's concern for them and of their commitment to God. The rainbow is given to Noah as a covenant sign (Gen. 9:8-17). Circumcision is offered as a covenant sign to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 17:1-4). Bread and wine are chosen by Christ as the emblems "of the covenant" ratified through His blood (Mark 16:24; Matt. 26:28). These and similar signs have been given during the history of salvation to reassure human beings of God's concern to save them and to restore them to fellowship with Him.

The Sabbath as Symbol of Belonging

It is noteworthy that among the various God-given covenant signs or symbols, the Sabbath occupies a unique place. It is unique because it is not an object or a place accessible only to a few, but a day (time) available to all. It is unique also because it has functioned as the symbol *par excellence* of the divine election and mission of God's people. Five times in the Scripture the Sabbath is designated as a perpetual covenant" or as a "sign" between Yahweh and His people (Ex. 31:13, 16, 17; Ezek. 20:12, 20).

Unique origin. The Sabbath is a unique covenant sign, first of all because it is the first sign given by God to reveal His desire to fellowship with His creatures. The day tells us that God created human beings to live not in mystical solitude but in the joy of His fellowship. As explained in Hebrews, "God rested on the seventh day" that He might invite His people "to enter it [God's rest]" (Heb. 4 :4-6).

Karl Barth rightly calls God's rest at the conclusion of creation "the covenant of the grace of God," because it invites "man to rest with Him . . . to participate in God's rest."¹ By resting, Barth explains, God "seriously accepted the world and man when He had created them, associating Himself with them in the fullest sense. Hence the history of the covenant was really established in the event of the seventh day."²

Unique survival. The Sabbath is unique also because it has survived not only the Fall, but also the Flood, the Egyptian slavery, the Babylonian exile, the Roman anti-Sabbath legislation,³ the French and Russian temporary introduction of the ten-day week, blank—day calendar proposals (interrupting 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 belonging to God.

The ancient prophets recognized the value of Sabbathkeeping in maintaining allegiance to God. Ezekiel, for example, when he saw the danger of the total extinction of God's people as a result of the exile, appealed to them to remember their divine election by means of the distinguishing function of the Sabbath (Ezek. 20:12-21). Similarly Isaiah presents the Sabbath as the symbol of belonging to the covenant not only for the Jews (Is 58:13-14), but also for "the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord" (Is 56 :6, 7, 2, 4).

Unique function. The Sabbath is, furthermore, a unique covenant symbol because it has helped believers throughout the ages to maintain their faith—their belonging relationship with God. The regular observance of the Sabbath, as noted by Dennis J. McCarthy, "was a medium which handed on knowledge of the covenant as a relationship and a doctrine."⁴

The Jewish scholar Achad Haam underlines this vital function of the Sabbath in the history of Judaism, stating: "We can affirm without any exaggeration that the Sabbath has preserved the Jews more than the Jews have preserved the Sabbath. If the Sabbath had not restored to them the soul, renewing every week their spiritual life, they would have become so degraded by the depressing experiences of the workdays, that they would have descended to the last step of materialism and of moral and intellectual decadence."⁵

Sabbathkeeping has contributed to the survival not only of Judaism but of Christianity as well. The essence of a Christian life is a relationship with God. Such a relationship grows and becomes more meaningful, especially through the time and opportunities for worship, service, meditation, and fellowship provided by the Sabbath day. Consequently a proper observance of God's holy day reflects a healthy relationship with God, while disregard for it bespeaks spiritual decline. This was true in ancient Israel; it is also true in modern Christianity.

In a speech delivered on November 13, 1862, President Abraham Lincoln emphasized this vital function of the Sabbath, saying: "As we keep or break the Sabbath day, we nobly save or meanly lose the last and best hope by which man arises."⁶ Obviously for Abraham Lincoln the Sabbath day meant Sunday. Puritans applied the name and the precept of the Sabbath to Sunday. This does not detract from the fact that one of America's outstanding presidents recognized in the Sabbath precept the last best hope that can renew and elevate human beings.

If this were true in Lincoln's day, it is even truer today when the tyranny of things enslaves many lives. In his Pastoral Letter *DIES DOMINI* (THE LORD'S DAY), Pope John Paul II speaks eloquently of the need to rediscover the Sabbath to liberate Christians from the bondage of materialism and rediscover the peace of fellowship with God for which they were created.

REASONS FOR THE DIVINE CHOICE OF THE SABBATH AS COVENANT SYMBOL

Why has God chosen the Sabbath (a day rather than an object) to aid human beings to experience and express a belonging relationship with Him. What characteristics does the seventh day possess that enable it to function as a meaningful symbol of a covenant relationship? The Scripture suggests at least seven reasons.

1. Ownership

A first reason for the divine choice of the Sabbath to symbolize a mutual belonging relationship is suggested by the fact that the day is, to use M. G. Kline's words, the Creator's "seal of ownership and authority."⁷ As a seal of divine ownership, the Sabbath provides the legitimate basis for a covenant relationship. This meaning of ownership is explicitly expressed both in the Fourth Commandment and in its sister institutions, the sabbatical and the jubilee years.

In the Commandment the believer is invited to "remember" on the Sabbath 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 the believer to realize constantly and effectively that this world and his very life belong to God. This recognition of God's ownership of one's life is indispensable for a total commitment and belonging to God. Is this not true also at the human level? Can husband and wife truly say they belong to each other, unless they are willing to say to each other, "I am yours and you are mine"?

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. The believer who accepts God's claim over the last day of the week—the Sabbath—accepts God's claim over his whole life and world. The believer who accepts this particular sign of God's ownership, stopping his work on the Sabbath in order to allow God to work in him 15 demonstrates and experiences a total belonging to God.

2. Holiness

A second reason for the divine choice of the Sabbath to express a covenant relationship is suggested by the holiness of the Sabbath. As a holy day, the Sabbath effectively exemplifies not only the divine choice of time but of people as well. The

holiness of the Sabbath is frequently affirmed in the Scripture. God Himself “made it holy” (Gen 2 :3; Ex. 20 :11) and repeatedly calls it “holy” (Ex 16:22; 31:14; Is 58:13).

The fundamental meaning of the word “holy” is “separation, setting apart” for divine manifestation. When applied to the Sabbath, it expresses the distinctive manifestation of God’s presence in the life of His people. Isaiah, for example, pictures God as refusing to be present at the Sabbath assembly of His people, because of their “iniquity” (Is 1:13-14). God’s absence makes their worship experience not holy but rather an “abomination” or a “trampling of my courts” (vs. 12-13).

As the symbol of God’s free choice of His special time to manifest His presence, the Sabbath can constantly and effectively remind the believer who keeps it of his special divine election and mission in this world. In other words, as the Sabbath stands as the “Holy Day” among the weekly days, so the believer who keeps it is constantly invited to stand as God’s chosen “Holy person” among a perverse generation. Holiness in time points to holiness of being.

It is noteworthy that the expression “to sanctify” or “to keep holy” translates the Hebrew word *le-kadesh*, a term which is commonly used in the Talmud to describe the engagement of a woman to a man.⁸ As a woman who declared her belonging to a man was “sanctified, made holy,” so a person who consecrates his or her life to the Lord is “holy,” belonging exclusively to God.

The Sabbath was chosen by God as the emblem of this mutual belonging relationship, because it expresses both divine initiative and human response. On the one hand it signifies that God has chosen to sanctify His people and, on the other hand, that the latter accepts God’s partnership—His sanctifying presence. Such an acceptance is expressed in a practical way, namely, by making oneself totally available to God on the Sabbath. The Lord does not force His presence upon anyone, but stands at the heart’s door and knocks (Rev. 3:20). The Sabbath provides the opportunity to open one’s door in order to welcome the Savior as the guest of honor. The person who makes himself available on the Sabbath for Christ, allowing Him to work within his life, is made different—he is sanctified.

3. Incorruptible

A third reason for God’s choice of the Sabbath to signify mutual commitment is found in the incorruptible and universal nature of time. Being time, the Sabbath is a symbol which is always fresh in meaning, and readily accessible to every human being. The Sabbath is *incorruptible* because it is not a material sign like the Tabernacle, or the Temple; it is immaterial since it is time rather than space or matter. The ideas which are attached to material objects in the course of time tend to deteriorate and disintegrate like the objects themselves.

My native city of Rome is filled with glorious monuments of antiquity. Most Romans view them with a sense of pride, as symbols of past greatness. Yet if one were to ask one hundred Romans who built the Colosseum (the very symbol of the eternity of Rome) and when, chances are ninety per cent would reply, “Don’t ask me! I haven’t a clue.”

Monuments are regarded with devotion but are gradually deprived of meaning and life. The Sabbath, however, is not a relic of antiquity which has lost its meaning, since being time and not matter it is beyond human ability to manipulate and destroy. The Sabbath of Adam, that of Jesus, as well as yours and mine, is still the same 24-hour day. Its meaning is always fresh and relevant. In fact, it is more relevant today than when it was originally given, because its meaning and function have grown in the unfolding history of salvation.

4. Universal

A fourth reason for the divine choice of the Sabbath as a sign of mutual belonging, is suggested by the *universal* nature of time. Being *time*, the Sabbath is not only incorruptible but also *universal*, that is, accessible to all. Since time can be shared, God through the Sabbath can reach every human being without crowding out anyone. Thus there is no need to make a pilgrimage to Rome or to Jerusalem or to Salt Lake City, to observe the Sabbath, because the day reaches every human being weekly, whether one lives in a splendid palace or in a squalid prison.

No special objects are needed to celebrate the Sabbath. To celebrate the Passover, for example, lambs, unleavened bread 'and bitter herbs' were needed. Similarly, to celebrate the Lord's Supper, bread and wine (as well as basins and water for Christians who practice footwashing) are required. These elements are not readily available to all in every circumstance. With the Sabbath celebration, such a problem does not exist, because the only thing really needed for its celebration is a heart that loves the Lord.

In the offering of money there is no equality. A wealthy person is able to give a larger offering than someone who is poor. It is not so with the offering of time, because every person has an equal measure of it. This means that through the Sabbath God gives an equal opportunity to all to express belonging to Him. One may have less money to offer God than others, but not less time since each person has an equal measure of it. Human life is a measure of time. What a person does with it is indicative of his system of values and priorities.

There is no time for those toward whom one feels indifferent, but one makes time for those whom one loves. To be able on the seventh day to withdraw from the world of things to meet the invisible God in the quiet of one's soul means to love God totally; it means to express inwardly and outwardly one's total love and belonging to God.

5. Renewal of Baptismal Covenant

A fifth reason for God's choice of the Sabbath as a sign of a mutual belonging relationship is suggested by the fact that the day provides a weekly renewal of the baptismal covenant (vow). Baptism is a symbolic reenactment of Christ's death, burial, and resurrection in the life of the believer who enters into covenant with Christ by dying to sin and rising into a new moral life (Rom. 6:3-4). Like Baptism, the Sabbath, like is a form of renouncement and renewal?

Renouncement. Through the Sabbath God invites us to renounce several things in order for us to receive His greater gifts. In the first place we are to renounce the security of the weekly work (Ex. 20:10), even when circumstances seem unfavorable: "in plowing time and in harvest you shall rest" (Ex. 34:21).

A. Martin rightly notes that in the context of Jewish life, the interruption of work especially at plowing and harvest time, was a genuine form of renouncement which could easily result "in less food available."⁹ Even today Sabbathkeeping for some persons entails real sacrifice and renouncement, especially in countries where the right to be free from work on Saturday does not exist.

Like baptism, the Sabbath also means renouncement of that greediness and selfishness which, though symbolically buried under the baptismal waters, continually tends to reappear and thus needs to be overcome. Some persons have been made slaves but many more have chosen to become slaves of their grasping greediness. The latter work and would wish others to work for them all seven days out of seven, in order to gain more and more and be satisfied with less and less.

The Sabbath is designed to cure such insatiable greediness by enjoining to rest, that is, to stop being greedy and start being grateful. It commands to take time not to seek

more material goods but to gratefully acknowledge the bounties received. A grateful heart is indispensable for maintaining a meaningful, mutual, belonging relationship, and for experiencing inner rest and peace. Like baptism, the Sabbath means also renouncement of self-sufficiency. Through the Sabbath, the confession of surrender to Christ, which the believer makes at baptism, is renewed every week.

The success a Christian achieves in his work may make him feel secure and self-sufficient, thus forgetful of his dependency upon God: "lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, 'who is the Lord?'" (Prov. 30:9). The Sabbath, by enjoining cessation from work, invites the believer to glance away from his own achievements and to look instead to God's work and working in him.

Renewal. As the *water* in baptism has the dual meaning of death and a new life, so the *rest* of the Sabbath signifies both renouncement and *renewal*. If baptism be regarded as the point of entrance into the new Christian life, the Sabbath is the weekly renewal of that initial commitment.

This weekly renewal is made possible through the time the Sabbath affords to take stock and ascertain where one stands. The opportunity the Sabbath provides to have a special rendezvous with oneself, with others, and with God, results in *physical, social and spiritual* renewal.

The *physical renewal* (recreation) the Sabbath rest provides differs from the rest experience of the weekdays. During the week one can at best rest from work but not from the thought of it. On the Sabbath a Christian should and can rest not only from work, but also from the thought of it, knowing that on that day he need not worry about time-clocks, deadlines, tests, production or competition. On the Sabbath the body can rest because the mind is at rest, and the mind is at rest because it rests in God.

The Sabbath contributes also to *social renewal*, by strengthening those relationships established through baptism. The daily work scatters the immediate family members as well as the church members in different directions, leaving little time to cultivate marital, parental and fraternal relationships. During a busy working week, it is easy to forget the needs of the members of the body of Christ into whom "we were all baptized" (I Cor. 12:13).

Sometimes even the members of one's own family are neglected. On the Sabbath, as believers experiences afresh the assurance of God's presence and love, they are motivated and challenged to strengthen neglected relationships; to alleviate the suffering of others; to share with all, friends and foes, their friendship, fellowship and concern. This service which is rendered on and through the Sabbath renews and strengthens that covenant relationship with God and His people established at baptism.

Most important of 'all, the Sabbath is a time of *spiritual renewal*. It is a time when the believer renews his baptismal commitment by taking time to remember and appreciate God's saving activities. On the Sabbath spiritual renewal takes place especially through the private and communal worship experience, which differs substantially from that of the weekdays.

Sabbath worship is not a moment of meditation squeezed into a busy workday program, but rather it is a whole day when earthly concerns are laid aside, when the many distracting voices are silenced, in order to acknowledge God's "worth-ship," to experience His presence and to hear more distinctly His voice. Through this special encounter with God, believers receive fresh forgiveness; they brings order into their fragmented daily life; they reestablish their moral consciousness; they gain a new set of divine goals for their lives; they receive fresh inspiration and grace to do the will of God. This spiritual renewal that the Sabbath strengthens and enrich the covenant relationship between God and the believer.

6. Spiritual

A sixth reason for God's choice of the Sabbath to symbolize His covenant relationship with His people is suggested by the fact that the seventh day provides a fitting reminder of the spiritual nature of this relationship. Perhaps Jesus came closest to defining God's nature when He told the Samaritan woman, "God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth" (John 4 :24).

The context suggests that Christ described God as "Spirit" to counteract the misconception that God is to be worshiped in a special holy place. For the Samaritan woman the right *place* was fundamental to worship: "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain; and you say that in Jerusalem is the *place* where men ought to worship" (John 4:20). Jesus responded by offering a most profound insight into the nature of true worship. He explained that human beings communicate with God not through holy places, objects, or things, but "in spirit and truth," that is, in a spiritual and truthful way. Genuine worship is offered to God not by going to special shrines or by performing elaborate rituals, as such, but by speaking and listening to God with heart, soul and mind (Mark 12:30).

The Sabbath and God's nature. The Sabbath contribute in several ways to prevent the deadening objectification of God and thus aid in maintaining a living relationship between God and His people. In the first place the Sabbath as a *temporal* symbol aptly characterizes *God's nature*, since the latter is as mysterious as the nature of time. Like God, time cannot be defined or controlled. As a person can relate to time but cannot control it, so he can relate to God but cannot control Him. In other words, both God and time transcend human outreach. They cannot be manipulated and changed into something else.

Abraham Joshua Heschel characterizes time as "*otherness*," a mystery transcending human experience, and "*togetherness*," an occasion to experience fellowship.¹⁰ Are not *otherness* and *togetherness* basic characteristics of God's nature? Being a measure of time and not an object, the Sabbath can effectively remind the believer that he belongs to the God who cannot be objectified, circumscribed or encapsulated, to the God who is "beyond," "wholly other," transcending human analogies ("To whom then will you liken God?"—Is. 40:18) and controls. At the same time, as a moment of togetherness, the Sabbath reminds the believer that his God is not only "beyond" but also very "close," so close that he can rest in Him (Heb. 4:10).

An antidote against idolatry. The Sabbath helps maintain a spiritual relationship with God not only, as just seen, by reminding the believer of God's nature, but also by protecting him from idolatry. Fritz Guy aptly states that "worship by means of a holy day is removed as far as possible from idolatry. It is quite impossible to cut, carve or construct the image of a day."¹¹ Some might challenge this statement by pointing to the Hebrews, who apparently succeeded, especially in the days of Jesus, in objectifying the Sabbath by tying its observance to minute regulations.

The reduction of the Sabbath from an occasion to meet with God, to a "thing" to be kept with utmost precision, can turn the day from a means of worship into an object of worship. This adulteration of the Sabbath does not detract, however, from its unique quality, but only serves to show that even the most "fireproof" God-given symbol can be prostituted into an object of legalistic and even idolatrous worship.

Of all symbols, the Sabbath as time still remains the one that best resists objectification. It provides the surest protection from worshipping rather than worshiping "*Him*." It is noteworthy that both at creation and in the Ten Commandments, mankind is given not a "holy object" but a "holy day" in which to experience the holiness of God. The first Four Commandments spell out the three "don'ts" and the one "do" that should regulate the relationship between God and His people.

First, don't give to God a divided loyalty by worshiping Him as One among many gods. Second, don't worship God by means of material representations. Third, don't use thoughtlessly the name of God. Then comes the Fourth Commandment which is a "do" rather than a "don't." It invites mankind to "remember" God not through a holy object but through a holy day.

The first three commandments seem designed to remove the obstacles to a true spiritual relationship with God, namely, the worship of false gods or of their images and disrespect for the true God. With the way to God's presence cleared, the Fourth Commandment invites the believer to experience divine fellowship, not through the recitation of magic charms, but in time shared together. Obviously God sees time as a most fitting symbol of the spiritual relationship that should exist between Himself and His people.

The importance of this divine choice is underscored by the repeated attempts human beings have made to reduce a living and spiritual relationship with God to the veneration of dead objects: shrines, icons, tombs, creeds, and relics (such as the bones of saints, pieces of wood from a cross, or pieces of garments). The small chapel of St. Laurence in Rome is called *Sancta Sanctorum*—"The Most Holy." Above its altar, a Latin inscription reads: *Non est in toto sanctior orbe locus*, which means, "there is no holier place in the world." On what ground is such an astonishing claim made? Primarily on the basis of the great number of relics—dead objects—the chapel contains. The most venerated object is an image of the Redeemer claimed to have been produced by a divine agency.

Can God be blamed for these human attempts to seek "holiness" through things rather than through an I-Thou spiritual relationship? Certainly not, for God took utmost precaution to prevent human beings from materializing and objectifying His spiritual nature. This is evidenced, for example, by the fact that when the second Person of the Godhead became a Human Being for about thirty-three years, He refrained from leaving a single material mark that can be authenticated as His own.

Christ did not build or own a house; He did not write books or own a library; He did not leave the exact date of His birth or of His death; He did not leave descendants. He left an empty tomb, but even this place is still disputed. He left no "thing" of Himself, but only the assurance of His spiritual presence: "Lo, I am with you 'always, to the close of the age" (Matt. 28 :20).

Why did Christ pass through this world in this mysterious fashion, leaving no physical footprints or material traces of Himself? Why did the Godhead miss the golden opportunity provided by the incarnation to leave a permanent material evidence and reminder of the Savior's stay on this planet? Is this not clear evidence of God's concern to protect mankind from the constant temptation of reducing a spiritual relationship into a "thing-worship"?

It was because of this same concern that God chose the Sabbath—a day rather than an object— as the symbol of a divine-human belonging relationship. Being time, a mystery that defies human attempts to define it, the Sabbath provides a constant protection against the worship of objects and a fitting reminder of the spiritual nature of the covenant relationship between God and His people.

7. Commitment

A seventh reason for God's choice of the Sabbath as a covenant symbol is that this day expresses effectively 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. How does the Sabbath express divine and human commitment?

Divine commitment. 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 humanity in particular. With regard to creation 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 through this day provides a constant reassurance to His creatures of His availability and concern. As eloquently 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."¹²

This divine commitment becomes explicit in the covenant relationship, where 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 covenant relationship.

This commitment led God to give "his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life" (John 3:16). The Sabbath, as Karl Barth correctly explains, "reminds man of God's plan for him, of the fact that He has already carried it out, and that in His revelation He will execute both His will with him and His work for and toward him. It points him to the Yes which the Creator has spoken to him, His creature, and which He has made true and proved true once and for all in Jesus Christ."¹³

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. This relationship is not, as Karl Barth points out, "an indirect but a direct connection, not only a relationship but genuine intercourse."¹⁴ It is by assuming this obligation that a person becomes free: free for God, for self, for the immediate family and for others.

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 the believer to acknowledge that his whole life, not just one seventh, belongs to God. It represents the Christian's response to God's claim on his life. By bringing all routine work to a halt for one day, he acts out his commitment to the Lord of his life. A similar objective is accomplished through the return of the tithe to God, as a recognition of His ultimate ownership.

Summing up, the Sabbath, on the one hand, symbolizes God's commitment to be available for and to save humanity. On the other hand, Sabbath keeping expresses the believer's acceptance of the Creator and Redeemer's claim upon his life.

Conclusion

Our foregoing study of the intrinsic characteristics the Sabbath suggests seven possible reasons why God chose the seventh day to function as a meaningful symbol of a divine-human covenant relationship.

First, as the sign of divine ownership, the Sabbath constantly reminds the believer of his belonging to God. Second, as God's holiness in time, the Sabbath reassures the believer who keeps it of his divine election and mission in this world. Third, as an incorruptible symbol, the Sabbath is always fresh in its meaning. Fourth, as time—a universal endowment—the Sabbath is accessible to all and enables every human being to express commitment to God.

Fifth, as a type of baptism, the Sabbath provides a weekly opportunity to renew the baptismal covenant, by experiencing anew self-renouncement as well as physical, social and spiritual renewal. Sixth, as a temporal symbol, the Sabbath protects the believer from idolatry, reminding him of the spiritual nature of his covenant relationship with God. Seventh, as a fitting symbol of mutual commitment, the Sabbath reassures humanity of God's availability and invites believers to express their belonging to God by offering Him a specific measure of time—the seventh day—as a token expression of their total life.

May the Sabbath become for us the day when we stop our work to allow God to work in us and thus experience the awareness of His presence, peace and mutual belonging.

NOTES

1. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ET, 1956, III, part 1, p. 98. Karl Barth emphasizes that "It is the covenant of the grace of God which in this event, at the supreme and final point of the first creation story, is revealed as the starting-point for all that follows. Everything that precedes is the road to this supreme point" (p. 98).
2. Ibid., III, part 1, pp. 216, 217.
3. Emperor Hadrian's prohibition of Sabbathkeeping is discussed in Samuele Bacchiocchi, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 1977, pp. 159-161.
4. Dennis J. McCarthy, *Old Testament Covenant*, 1972, p. 88.
5. Quoted by Augusto Segre, in "Il Sabato nella storia Ebraica," in the symposium *L'uomo nella Bibbia e nelle culture ad essa contemporanee*, 1975, p. 116. Herbert W. Richardson expresses a similar view, saying: "I believe that the power of Judaism to survive in the face of constant enmity and disadvantage arises from its firm sense of being a 'holy people,' i.e., from its recurring celebration of the Sabbath sacrament" (*Toward an American Theology*, 1967, p. 132).
6. Quoted by R. H. Martin, *The Day: A Manual on the Christian Sabbath*, 1933, p. 184. Cf. *Sunday* 65 (1978): 22.
7. M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King. The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy*, 1963, p. 18. Gerhard von Rad recognizes the "right of ownership" expressed by the Sabbath and says, "it is the day which really belongs to God and sets a standard undefiled by any kind of human business.. - - the celebration of the sabbath, at least in Israel's earlier period, was discharged by abstaining demonstratively from productive labour, and symbolically handing the day back to God" (*Deuteronomy. A Commentary*, 1966, p. 58).

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