

ENDTIME ISSUES NEWSLETTER No. 218

“The Meaning, Celebration and Date of Christmas”

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INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.

Greetings from London, England, where I have been invited to speak at two rallies. It is always a pleasure to minister to our fellow-believers in England. They greatly appreciate the visit of a Bible scholar who expands their understanding and experience of Bible truths.

At this time England is suffering the same financial crisis of the USA. In the main street of the little town of Eastcote where I am staying with a most gracious couple, six shops have recently closed down, including Woolworths, a popular chain of outlets that have been in business for 119 years. Unemployment is at an all-time high and the British pound is declining faster than the US dollar. During this past week the pound declined from \$1.58 to \$1.46 to the pound.

As pointed out by the European Episcopal Commission a few days ago, the financial crisis is exposing a deeper spiritual crisis. People who have placed their trust in their wealth, are suddenly discovering that their wealth no longer provides them security for the future. This reminds us of the prophetic description of the Fall of Babylon – the symbol of the endtime apostasy and rebellion against God: “All your riches and splendor have vanished, never to be recovered . . . In one hour such great wealth has been brought to ruin” (Rev 18:14, 17).

The solution to the financial crisis facing the world today, is to be found not in promulgating Sunday laws, as proposed to the European Parliament by the European Episcopal Commission at the annual meeting held in Brussels on November 12-14, 2008, but in an internal, moral, and spiritual, renovation. The financial crisis could well be one of the means used by God to call the remnant out of Babylon: “Come out of her my people, so that you will not share in her sins . . . and receive any of her plagues” (Rev 18:4).

THE MEANING, CELEBRATION, AND DATE OF CHRISTMAS

Several readers have encouraged me to post a study on “The Meaning, Celebration, and Date of Christ’s Birth.” I accepted the challenge with hesitation because being away from my office, my resources are more limited. The study focuses on three significant aspects of Christ’s Birth: Its meaning, its celebration, and its date.

In this study I intentionally avoid using the term “Christmas,” because it is a compound of two words that derives from the Old English *Cristes Maesses*, the Mass of Christ, that is, the Catholic Mass celebrated at midnight on December 24 in honor of Christ’s birth. The Catholic practice of celebrating Christ’s birth through a special Mass on “Christmas’ Eve,” technically speaking is a contradiction, since the Mass for Catholics is a re-enactment of Christ’s sacrifice. Honoring Christ’s birth, by re-enacting His atoning sacrifice, obscures the significance of His birth. Thus, to be true to Scripture, we will speak of Christ’s Birth, rather than of Christ’s Mass.

The study of Christ’s Birth poses significant theological, historical, and practical questions. For the sake of brevity, only the major questions will be briefly addressed in this study.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTRIBUTION

During the past few days several readers have sent an year-end contribution for our ministry. Thank you immensely for expressing in a tangible way your deep appreciation for the information and inspiration received from these Bible studies. Your notes of appreciation have been of great encouragement to me, but they did not help me to pay my bills. Your donations motivate me to accomplish greater things for the Lord.

Looking back to 2008 I note that I have posted about 25 newsletters, that is, about one every two weeks, for a total of over 600 pages. Preparing each newsletter takes between 50 to 100 hours, because I try to address each subject as thoroughly as I possibly can. This newsletter that you are about to read on “The Meaning, Celebration, and Date of Christ’s Birth,” is an example of my dedication to this ministry of research.

This is a voluntary ministry which is not supported financially by any benefactor or church organization. Since I took an early retirement in the year 2000, I do not receive any pay check from Andrews University or any other source. I try to support my ministry through the sale of my publications.

Lately both myself and Cristina Piccardi, an outstanding soprano who joined my ministry a little over a year ago, have received invitations from overseas that we cannot accept for lack of funds. For example, I am writing this newsletter from London, England, where I am speaking at two rallies. Because of the financial limitations of our churches, only part of the travel expenses are refunded. The 25% decline of the value of the British Pound during the past couple of months, has reduced considerably the refund of the travel expenses.

If you have been blessed by our ministry and wish to include our ministry among the recipients of your year-end donations, your gift will be gratefully received. It will be used strictly for our outreach ministry. At this time we are receiving many requests from countries in Africa, Inter-America and South America for free copies of the English and Spanish Editions of *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* This is a powerful witnessing book that greatly benefits our people in these poor countries. Your contribution will make it possible for us to send many more free copies to our fellow-believers overseas.

Thank you for considering our ministry among the beneficiaries of your year-end contributions. If you need a tax deduction receipt, write your check to MASTER BUILDERS. Our son, Dany, who is an Arc hi tech, has a non-profit account for their overseas mission building projects and can issue a tax deductible receipt. For general contributions, write your check to BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, and send it to 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103.

May the Lord bless your life and work during the new year 2009.

OUR MINISTRY OF INTERCESSION

**Loretta Bacchiocchi, Associate Professor,
Department of Nursing B.S.N., M.S.N.,
Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences**

The reference that my father made to the intercessory prayer ministry of our team, generated an unusual number of requests from different parts of the world. I have received many phone calls and emails, which we are bringing before the Lord and interceding on your behalf. If you have emailed me and have not heard from me, please rest assured you are being prayed for, and you will be hearing from me. These past weeks have been unusually busy and there were several local major prayer needs which required much time our prayer time.

This past weekend our prayer team prayed for people of all ages, beginning with a 7 months old baby! Our team has become increasingly aware of how Satan is attacking and afflicting our precious brothers and sisters. It breaks our hearts to see how many people feel helpless, hopeless, and/or are overwhelmed with difficulties and/or illnesses. It is our hope that through our prayer interventions peace, joy, strength, courage, and boldness are restored.

Physical healing is only a portion of the aim of our prayers. The reality is that many brothers and sisters need emotional and spiritual healing as well. Many have family members who also need to be restored. Through our intercessory prayers we have seen many people completely restored.

Feel free to forward your prayer requests to me <Loretta.Bacchiocchi@FHCHS.EDU> or <loretta_bacchiocchi@fhchs.edu> You can also reach me by phone at 407-880-0336. Since I am away most of each day, leave a voice message Our prayer team will bring your petitions before the Lord.

ARE YOU CONSIDERING MOVING TO BERRIEN SPRINGS, NEAR ANDREWS UNIVERSITY?

If you are planning to move to Berrien Springs, Michigan, near Andrews University, my wife and I have a brand new three bedrooms townhouse to offer you, located one mile from Andrews University.

We have bought this townhouse from our son, Dan Bacchiocchi, who has developed a 12 units Townhome community designed around the needs of empty nesters, retirees or young professional families.

Our three bedrooms townhouse has been upgraded to meet our expectation. We have added granite counter tops, wooden floors, a heated sun room, stainless steel appliances, etc. Our plan is one day to move from our current large home to this smaller pleasant home.

If you want to see a picture of our townhome with the floor design, click at this link: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/townhouse.html>

At this time we are thinking of leasing our townhome to a responsible couple or single person. The home is ready to move in immediately. The following services are provided FREE by the Association administering the properties and are included in the rent: Snow plowing of the drives and front walks, landscaping maintenance and lawn cutting, exterior maintenance of the townhome, insurance of the exterior of the townhome, water service supply and septic system maintenance, bi-annual replacement of heating filters.

We are willing to rent the townhouse at a reasonable price to a responsible couple. For further information, calls us at (269) 471-2915 or email us at <sbachiocchi@biblicalpherspectives.com>

UPDATE ON THE ENGLISH AND SPANISH EDITION OF *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

The response to both the English and Spanish edition of ***Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?*** has surpassed our fondest expectations. The English edition has already been reprinted three times. Many have shared with me how the book has helped friends and relatives to accept our message.

A pastor sent a copy of ***Popular Beliefs*** to his son who has left the church. After reading the book, the young man informed his father that the book had clarified some of the questions troubling him and he wanted to come back to the church.

Two evangelists reported to me that they gave ***Popular Beliefs*** to people who had questions. After reading the book these people decided to be baptized.

Surprisingly I received orders for this book from churches belonging to different denominations. This past week I received an order from a United Church of Canada and from a Church of Christ congregation.

To facilitate the circulation of this timely and compelling witnessing book, we are offering two copies for the price of one or a case of 30 copies for only \$6.60 per copy, instead of the regular price of \$30.00.

If your church has not yet received a supply of this timely book, please let us know. We will be glad to mail you as many copies as needed. You will find the order information at the end of this newsletter.

WILL THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF ISLAM GROW DURING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION?

You will find my answer to this question at the end of this newsletter. You should find my discussion of this question informative, though you may not agree with everything I wrote. That is not a problem. My goal is to cause people to look at issues from a broader perspective.

THE ANNOUNCEMENTS OF THE SEMINARS, SPECIAL OFFERS AND SERVICES ARE PLACED AT THE END OF THIS NEWSLETTER

“THE MEANING, CELEBRATION, AND DATE OF CHRISTMAS”
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THE MEANING OF CHRIST’S BIRTH

In the Christian world the celebration of Christ’s birth has much greater significance than the commemoration of His death and resurrection at Easter/Passover. Yet from a biblical perspective, much greater coverage is given to the “Passion Week” of Jesus, than to His birth.

The story of the birth of Jesus is told only in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, and even there the concern of the Gospel writers is to stress the theological meaning of the birth of the world's Saviour, rather than to provide the historical details of the event. By contrast, all the four Gospels devote almost one third of their narrative to the events of the last week of Jesus' life.

Yet, it is Christ's birth that has captured the imagination and interest of the Christian world. A possible reason is that births is more joyful and attractive events than death. We celebrate the birth of a child, but we lament the death of a person.

There are no indications that during the first two centuries the early church ever celebrated Christ's birth. The event that was widely celebrated was the death and resurrection of Jesus at the annual Passover.

Yet, God's willingness to take on human flesh and to be born as a baby, tells us much about the character of God. Briefly stated, Christ's birth as a helpless baby tells me four major things about God.

God is Emmanuel: God with Us

First, the birth of the Second Person of the Godhead as a helpless human baby tells me that God was willing to enter, not only into the limitations of human time at creation to fellowship with Adam and Eve, but also into the limitations, suffering and death of human flesh at the incarnation to become Emmanuel, God with us.

John expresses this truth eloquently saying: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). To appreciate the full force of this verse, it is important to note that the word for "dwelt – *skene*" in Greek, means "to set up a tent." This does not mean that Christ took temporary dwelling among us. In Scripture the word does not imply temporary residence. For example, in Revelation 21:3 the new heavens and new earth are described, saying: "Behold the dwelling (tent!) of God is with men. He will dwell (pitch his tent!) with them, and they shall be his people."

The notion of God pitching a tent among us, implies that He wants to be close to us and interact with us. This is why Christ was born as a baby. He wanted to be close to us and identify with us. He pitched His tent as if it were in our backyard.

Had Christ come as superman, a kind of King Kong, we would have feared him rather than loved Him. But He came as a baby, because we can embrace and love a helpless baby.

Our Human Body is God's Good Creation

Secondly, Christ's birth as a human baby tells me that God views our human body as His good creation. This Bible truth was unacceptable to NT dualistic thinkers who viewed the material human body as evil and to be discarded at death. These people formed influential "Christian" sects known as *Gnostic* or *Docetic*. They taught that Christ had a human appearance, but not a material human body, because the physical human body is evil. In their thinking, Christ could not have assumed a human body, without becoming contaminated. Divinity cannot assume humanity without losing its divine nature.

John condemns these people as "false prophets," possessed by the spirit of the antichrist. "Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of the antichrist" (1 John 4:2-3).

The fact that Christ was born as a human baby and lived as a human being, tells us that God views our human nature as His good creation. The purpose of the incarnation was not to change the nature of our bodies from physical to spiritual, but to redeem and restore them to their original perfection. This gives us reason to believe that if our human nature was "very good" at creation and at the incarnation, it will also be good at the final restoration. In other words, at the end God will not change our human bodies into something totally different because He found a flaw in His original creation, but will restore them to their original perfection.

Our God Was Willing to be Humbled for Our Salvation

Third, Christ's willingness to lay aside His Divine glory, position, and prerogatives in order to be born as a helpless baby into the human family, tells me that He was willing to humble Himself for our salvation.

Paul expresses this truth clearly, saying: "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus: who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Him

the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, *He humbled Himself*, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Wherefore God also bath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

Before His incarnation Jesus Christ was “in the form of God” (vs. 6), that is, He had the nature of God and that essential Deity could never cease to be. But in order to be born as a baby, “He humbled himself” by laying aside temporarily His majesty, glory, and position as the Son of God. Only eternity will reveal the depth of meaning found in the words, “He humbled Himself.”

Christ’s birth as a human baby in order to identify with us, tells me that we worship a God who is both transcendent and immanent, that is, who dwells beyond us in the glorious heavens, but also with us on this earth. He is both *El Shaddai* – “the Almighty God–, and *Emmanuel* – God with us. This is the tension between Christ who humbled Himself to become a baby and the Christ who rises triumphant over death and rules the world.

Our God Chose to Reveal Himself through a Helpless Baby

Fourth, God chose to reveal His holiness, purity, and glory through the face and nature of a helpless baby. Throughout the Old Testament, God wanted to make himself known to his people. But this was impossible. Before sin entered the world, Adam and Eve enjoyed a perfect relationship with God. They lived in the presence of God. But once sin entered the world, seeing God face to face became impossible. Human beings lost the ability to live safely in God’s presence.

When Moses told God that he wanted to see him, God reply, “You can not see me and live.” Being in the full presence of God was impossible for sinful human beings. So God told Moses to hide in this rock when He passed by. Moses caught a brief glance of God’s back, and he returned to his people with his face glowing so bright that the people made him put on a veil to protect them from the glory of God reflected in Moses’ face.

As Israelites wandered toward the Promised Land, God chose to reveal himself in a pillar of cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night. That was a

way for God to be with his people, without destroying them with the glory of His presence.

But God so desired to reveal himself more fully to the human family. This he accomplished through the incarnation of His Son, born into this world as a baby with flesh and blood like a human being. That is how God revealed himself to us.

Hebrews explains that in the past God revealed Himself in “various ways.” Visions, pillars of fire, and angels. “But in these last days He has spoken to us by His Son . . . The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word” (Heb 1:1-3). The baby Jesus is the closest revelation of God’s perfect holiness that He can reveal to this sinful world. And for that, we are eternally thankful that God chose to reveal Himself through the baby Jesus.

John expresses the same truth saying: “And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father” (John 1:14). It is through the incarnate Son of God that we behold God’s glory.

The same point is made in verse 18. “No one has ever seen God; the only Son who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him known.” Here the point is that though God is invisible, He has now revealed himself in a most unique way through the incarnation of Himself in His Son Jesus. In Jesus we see God. This is why Jesus could say: “He that hath seen me hath seen the Father” (John 14:9).

Summing up, Christ’s birth as a helpless baby tells that God is Emmanuel, in the sense that He wants to be close to us and identify with us. It tells us God views our human nature as His good creation, because it was taken on by His own Son. It tells us that God is a humble God. He was willing to humble Himself for our salvation. It tells us that God chose to reveal His holiness, purity, and glory through the face and nature of a helpless baby. Simply stated, Christ’s birth as a helpless baby tells us that we worship an awesome God, deeply interested to restore us to an harmonious relationship with Him.

THE CELEBRATION OF CHRIST'S BIRTH

The celebration of Christ's birth poses two problems: the *date* and the *manner* of the celebration. Regarding the *date* of Christ's birth, we shall shortly see that the adoption of the date of December 25th by the Western Church to commemorate Christ's birth was influenced by the pagan celebration of the return of the sun after the winter solstice.

Several scholarly studies suggests that the Feast of Tabernacles in September/October provides a much more accurate Biblical timing and typology for celebrating Christ's birth than the pagan dating of December 25th. The latter date is not only removed from the actual time of Christ's birth, but also is derived from the pagan celebration of the return of the sun after the winter solstice.

The question of the date of Christ's birth will be discussed shortly. At this juncture I wish to comment on the manner of its celebration. From a business perspective, Christmas has become the commercial event of the year. People spend the money they don't have for things they do not need. To promote greater sales, the day of Christ's birth has become a "Holiday Season," with shopping officially launched on the day after thanksgiving, known as "Black Friday."

According to *TIME* "For many retailers, holiday sales account for as much as 40% of their annual revenue and up to 80% of their profits — hence the name Black Friday or the day when stores traditionally go from being "in the red" to "in the black. (<http://www.time.com/time/business/article/0,8599,1855555,00.html>)

The commercialization of Christmas obscures the meaning of Christ's birth. Christ was born in a humble manger to teach us humility and self-sacrifice, not to celebrate His birth by eating and drinking, buying and selling.

The good news of the date of Christ's birth, is not a festival, with its gifts, parties, fun, feasting, yule log, and lighted Christmas tree—for these are but vestiges of a pagan culture that knows nothing of the true God. The good news of Christ's birth centers around a person—God's unspeakable gift, a Saviour who is Christ the Lord.

The Celebration of Christ's Birth in Some Adventist Churches

Several fellow believers asked me to comment specifically on the celebration of Christ's Birth in some Adventist churches. It is not uncommon for our larger Adventist churches to have a Christmas eve religious service. Somebody asked me the question: "Could you explain to me why some Adventist churches have special Christmas' eve services while others do not?"

Frankly, I do not understand why some Adventist churches today are adopting the popular practice of an evening church service on December 24. Perhaps they may not be aware that they are imitating the Catholic "Christ—Mass" celebrated at midnight of December 24. They may also ignore the pagan origin of the date of Christ's birth, which will be discussed later. Most likely, for these churches it may be just a matter of cultural conformity, namely, the desire to imitate the impressive Christmas eve services held in Catholic and Protestant churches.

The religious celebration of Christmas in Adventist churches is a recent development. I grew up in Rome, Italy, where we never had a Christmas tree in our home or church. My father worked regularly on Christmas day. Our family regarded Christmas as a Catholic festival, similar to the weekly Sunday, Easter Sunday, the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on March 25, the Feast of Mary's Assumption of August 15, All Saints Day on November 1, etc.

When I first came to the USA in 1960 as a seminary student at Andrews University, Christmas was primarily the Winter break. I do not recall much Christmas decorations and celebrations in the churches I visited during the four years I spent at the seminary from 1960 to 1964.

Gradually things have changed during the past 50 years. This is evident by the profusely illuminated and decorated front-end area of many Adventist churches at Christmas time. Some churches seem to compete with the rich decorations usually found in Greek Orthodox churches.

Personally I am not inspired by the elaborate Christmas decorations and celebration, because as a church historian I am aware of their pagan origin. Jesus was born in a humble manger. There were no fanciful decorations to

celebrate His birth. It would be more in keeping with the setting of His birth, to keep the decorations simple, designed to help people catch the real spirit of Christ's humble birth.

It was the celebration of the birth of the Sun-god in ancient Rome that was accompanied by a profusion of lights and torches and the decoration of trees. To facilitate the acceptance of the Christian faith by the pagan masses, the Church of Rome found it expedient to make not only the Day of the Sun the weekly celebration of Christ's resurrection, but also the Birth Day of the Invincible Sun-God on December 25, the annual celebration of Christ's birth. This point will be expanded later.

A Witnessing Opportunity

The recognition of the pagan origin of Christmas, with all its lights, decoration, partying, and celebration, does not mean that it is wrong to take time to remember the birth of Jesus at this time of the year. After all it would be well for us to remember every day how Jesus was willing to leave His glorious heavenly position in order to be born into the human family as a helpless baby to become our Savior.

No other story grips the human heart as the story of the divine love manifested in Christ's willingness to enter into the limitation, suffering, agony and death of human flesh to become "Emmanuel," God with us. Reflecting on the mystery of the incarnation is a worthy daily spiritual exercise, that can be done also on December 25, known in the Christian world as the "Advent Season," that is, the season celebrating the First Advent of the Lord.

In a way the Advent Season offers a unique opportunity to Adventists to help Christians understand the ultimate meaning of Christmas, which is to be found in the fact that Jesus who came the first time as the helpless baby of Bethlehem, will come back the second time as the Lord of Lords and the King of Kings. What this means is that the humble birth of Jesus in the human family, is the prelude to His glorious return to dwell with His people throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity. The ultimate celebration of the Advent Season awaits us at the glorious Second Coming of the Lord.

In the Adventist home. Christ's birth can be celebrated by remembering the needy in our church and community. As God loved us by giving His only

begotten Son for our salvation, so we can celebrate the self-giving love of God, by sharing our blessings with the needy. This means that instead of asking: What I am going to get for Christmas?, we could consider: Whom can I help this year?

THE DATE OF CHRIST'S BIRTH

Surprisingly, there is no mention in the New Testament of any the celebration of the anniversary of Christ's birth. The Gospels' accounts of Jesus' birth are very brief, consisting only of few verses found only in Matthew 1:16-24 and Luke 2:1-20). By contrast, the accounts of what is known as "The Passion Week," are lengthier, taking several chapters.

According to some estimates about one third of each Gospel is devoted to the Passion Week. It is evident that from the perspective of the Gospel writers, Christ's death is more important for our salvation than His birth. The reason is that through His atoning death Christ secured our eternal salvation. Yet, Christians today tend to celebrate more the birth of Christ than His death. Perhaps the reason is that the birth of a Child Deliverer captures the imagination more than the death of a Savior. Our society celebrates births, not deaths.

The Early Christians commemorated annually Christ's death and resurrection at Passover, but we have no clear indications of an annual celebration of Christ's birth. A major controversy erupted in the latter part of the second century over the Passover date, but the date of Christ's birth did not become an issue until sometimes in the fourth century. At that time the dispute centered primarily over two dates for Christ's birth: December 25 promoted by the Church of Rome and January 6, known as the Epiphany, observed by the Eastern churches. "Both these days," as Oscar Cullmann points out, "were pagan festivals whose meaning provided a starting point for the specifically Christian conception of Christmas."¹

Most Likely Christ Was Born toward the End of September or the Beginning of October

It is a recognized fact that the adoption of the date of December 25th by the Western Church to commemorate Christ's birth was influenced by the pagan celebration of the return of the sun after the winter solstice. More will be

said later about the factors which influenced the adoption of this date. At this juncture it is important to note that the date of December 25 is totally devoid of Biblical meaning and is grossly inaccurate as far as the actual time of Christ's birth.

If, as it is generally agreed, Christ's ministry began when He was about thirty years of age (Luke 3:23) and lasted three and one-half years until His death at Passover (March/April), then by backtracking we arrive at the months of September/October, rather than to December 25.² Indirect support for a September/October dating of Christ's birth is provided also by the fact that from November to February shepherds did not watch their flocks at night in the fields. They brought them into a protective corral called a "sheepfold." Hence, December 25 is a most unlikely date for the birth of Christ.³

The most likely date of Christ's birth is in the latter part of September or the beginning of October. This date corresponds to the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, known also as the Feast of Booths. This feast was the last and most important pilgrimage of the year for the Jews. The overcrowded conditions at the time of Christ's birth ("there was no place for them in the inn" — Luke 2:7) could be related not only to the census taken by the Romans at that time, but also to the many pilgrims that overrun the area especially during the Feast of Tabernacles.

Bethlehem is only four miles from Jerusalem. "The Romans," notes Barney Kasdan, "were known to take their censuses according to the prevailing custom of the occupied territories. Hence, in the case of Israel, they would opt to have the people report to their provinces at a time that would be convenient for them. There is no apparent logic to calling the census in the middle of winter. The more logical time of taxation would be after the harvest, in the fall,"⁴ when people had in their hands the revenue of their harvest.

Support for the belief that Christ was born at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, which occurs in late September or early October, is provided by the Messianic themes of the Feast of Tabernacles, which I will discuss in this newsletter and also by significant details about Zachariah's time of service at the Temple. These are examined by Prof. Noel Goh in a separate insightful article which you can access by clicking at this link -----

A Word About Prof. Noel Goh's Essay

To encourage you to read Prof. Noel Goh, "Another Look at the Date of Christ's Birth," let me introduce him. He is Pastor and Professor at the Methodist Seminary in Singapore. The Methodist Church is the largest Christian denomination in Singapore with the largest Christian seminary in that country. I first met Prof. Goh about five years ago during my first speaking engagement in Singapore. He attended the meetings and became interested in our Adventist message, especially the Sabbath message. He invited me for lunch in order to have a private conversation.

During the course of the conversation he expressed His desire to come to Andrews University for a few days to become better acquainted with our Adventist history and beliefs. Eventually he came and spent almost a month on our campus. He eagerly attended all the seminary classes that he could fit into his schedule and spent long hours in the library reading and viewing videos related to our Adventist history.

When he returned home to Singapore, he helped organize a meeting for the local clergy where I delivered two lectures, one on the Biblical wholistic view of human nature and the other on the change from Sabbath to Sunday in early Christianity.

Prof. Goh is not an Adventist yet, though he appreciates most of our fundamental beliefs and lifestyle. At this point I could describe him as a sabbatarian Methodist. He is a bright and gracious man, who shares his beliefs with his students and members in a friendly, confessional, non-confrontational manner.

You will enjoy reading his essay "Another Look at the Date of Christ's Birth." By examining the few time references found in Luke's Gospel about Mary, Elizabeth, and Zachariah's time of service at the Temple, he reaches the compelling conclusion that most likely Christ was born in September/October at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles. You will find his essay simple but very enlightening. You can access the essay by clicking at this link -----

Surprisingly I reached the same conclusion regarding the approximate date of Christ's birth, by considering especially the messianic themes of the Feast of Tabernacles. As you know, the major events of Christ's life and ministry are linked in the NT to the ancient Feast of Israel.

Christ's Birth at the Time of the Feast of Tabernacles

Being the Feast that celebrated in one sense God's past tabernacling or dwelling among His people with the cloud by day and the flaming fire by night during their journey to the Promised Land, it served to foreshadow the day when the Son of God would become flesh and tabernacle among us (John 1:14).

It is important to remember that the seven annual Feasts of ancient Israel were designed to illustrate important events of salvation history. Those who are interested to study in greater depth how the Feasts of Israel reveal the unfolding of the Plan of Salvation, are encouraged to read my two volumes *God's Festivals in Scripture and History*. The first volume on *The Spring Festivals* shows how Passover, Unleavened Bread, and Pentecost, point to the redemptive accomplishment of the first Advent, namely, Christ's Atoning death, His resurrection, ascension, inauguration of His heavenly ministry, and sending of the Holy Spirit.

The second volume on *The Fall Festivals* explain how the Fall feasts of Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles point to the consummation of redemption, namely, the judgment, the final disposition of sin, and the Second Advent when Christ will come to gather his people and dwell with them in a restored world.

Christ's First Coming to dwell among us in human flesh, serves as a prelude and guarantee of His Second Coming to dwell among the redeemed in divine glory. Both events, as we shall see, are typified by the Feast of Tabernacles. Adventist eschatology is largely based on the typology of the Day of Atonement. The Fall Festivals broadens the typological basis of Adventist eschatology by showing the contribution of the other two Fall Feasts of Trumpets and Tabernacles to the unfolding of the consummation of redemption.

Incidentally, our Adventist doctrine of the pre-Advent judgement is based solely on the typology of the Day of Atonement. The problem is that we tend to squeeze too much into the Day of Atonement: the beginning of the judgement, the process of the judgement, the completion of the judgement, and the Return of Jesus.

A careful study of the Fall Festivals show that the judgement process began with the Feast of the Trumpet, which announced the beginning of the judge-

ment with the blasting of the Shofar throughout the land. The judgement terminated 10 days later with the cleansing of the people from sin on the Day of Atonement. Five days later began the Feast of Tabernacles, a time to rejoice for the redemptive accomplishments of the First and Second Advent. You will find an extensive discussion of this subject in *The Fall Festivals*.

It is noteworthy that important events of the plan of salvation are consistently fulfilled on the Holy Days that prefigured them. Christ died on the Cross at the time when the Passover lamb was sacrificed (John 19:14). Christ arose at the time of the waving of the sheaf of barley as the first fruits of the coming harvest (1 Cor 15:23). The outpouring of the first fruits of God's Holy Spirit took place "when the day of Pentecost was fully come" (Acts 2:1, KJV). By the same token, Christ could well have been born at the time of the Feast of Tabernacles, since the feast typifies God's First Coming to dwell among us through the incarnation of His Son and His Second Coming to dwell with His people (Rev 21:3) throughout eternity.

Growth in Meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles

The Feast of Tabernacles in the Old and New Testament grows in its meaning and function during the course of redemptive history. It began in the Old Testament as the Fall Feast of the Harvest Ingathering to express thanksgiving to God for the bounties of the fruit harvest. It became the Feast of Booths to commemorate the way God sheltered the Israelites with the "booth" of His presence during their sojourning in the wilderness.

The celebration of the material blessings of the harvest and of the spiritual blessings of the divine sheltering during the exodus experience, served to foreshadow the blessings of the Messianic age when "there shall be neither cold nor frost . . . continuous day . . . living water, and . . . security (Zech 14:6, 7, 11). A highlight of the Messianic age would be the annual gathering of all the surviving nations "to keep the feast of booths" (Zech 14:16) in order to celebrate the establishment of God's universal Kingdom.

The rich typology of the Feast of Tabernacles finds in the New Testament both a Christological and an eschatological fulfillment. Christologically, the feast serves to reveal the Incarnation and mission of Christ. Jesus is God's ultimate tabernacle for in Him God tabernacled among men (John 1:14). He is the living water (John 7:37-38) typified by the water ceremony of the Feast

of Tabernacles. He is also the Light of the World (John 8:12) typified by the night illumination of the Temple during the Feast. Indeed, through Christ the blessings typified by the Feast of Tabernacles have become a reality for every believer.

Eschatologically, the Feast of Tabernacles serves to represent God's protection of His people through the trials and tribulation of this present life until they reach the heavenly Promised Land. There God will shelter the redeemed with the booth of His protective presence (Rev 7:15) and dwell with them for all eternity (Rev 21:3). As the ancient Israelites "rejoiced before the Lord" (Lev 23:40) at the Feast of Tabernacles by waving palm branches, singing, playing instruments, and feasting, so the countless multitude of the redeemed will rejoice before the throne of God, by waving palm branches (Rev 7:9), singing anthems of praise (Rev 7:10; 14:3; 15:2-4; 19:1-3), playing harps (Rev 14:2), and participating in the great marriage supper of the Lamb (Rev 19:9).

Ideal Time for the Birth of Jesus

The Feast of Tabernacles was the ideal time for the birth of Jesus because it was called "the season of our joy." The emphasis on the joyfulness of the feast is found in the instructions given in Deuteronomy 16:13-14: "You shall keep the feast of booths seven days, when you make your ingathering from your threshing floor and your wine press. You shall rejoice in your feast, you and your son and your daughter, your manservant and your maidservant, the Levite, the sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow who are within your towns."

In contrast to the Feasts of Trumpets and Atonement which were a time of introspection and repentance, the Feast of Booths was a time of rejoicing. The festive atmosphere reflected the Israelites' thankfulness for both material and spiritual blessings. The explicit reason for rejoicing is given in Deuteronomy 16:15: "because the Lord your God will bless you in all your produce and in all the work of your hands, so that you will be altogether joyful." It is not surprising that the rabbis called the feast "The Season of our Joy" (Zeman Simhatenu).

Ellen White notes that the reason for rejoicing was more than just the bounties of the harvest. She writes: "The feast was to be preeminently an occasion for rejoicing. It occurred just after the great Day of Atonement, when the assur-

ance had been given that their iniquity should be remembered no more. At peace with God, they now came before Him to acknowledge His goodness and praise Him for His mercy. The labor of harvest being ended, and the toils of the new year not yet begun, the people were free from care, and could give themselves up to the sacred, joyous influences of the hour.”⁵

The reason for the rejoicing was not only because of the material blessings of the harvest gathered in, but also because of the spiritual blessing of God’s protection and abiding presence. The foliage of the booths during which the Israelites lived for seven days during the Feast, reminded them that God will protect the faithful remnant during the time of trouble by sheltering them with the cloud by day and the flaming fire by night: “It will be for a shade [sakkath] by day from the heat, and for a refuge and shelter from the storm and the rain” (Is 4:6). In this context, the cloud and fire of God’s presence function as a protecting booth over His people.

Being the season of rejoicing for the blessings of the harvest and of God’s protective presence, the Feast of Tabernacles provided the ideal setting for the birth of Jesus—the One who came to dwell among the people in person. The themes of rejoicing relate perfectly to the terminology used by the angel to announce Christ’s birth: “Behold, I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people” (Luke 2:10). As “the season of our joy,” the Feast of Tabernacles provided the ideal settings for breaking “the good news of a great joy” for all the people, since the feast was also a celebration for all the nations (Zech 14:16).

A final interesting sideline supporting the possibility that Christ was born at the very time of the Feast of Tabernacles, is the reference to the wise men that came from the East to visit Christ (Matt 2:1). The land of the East is most likely Babylon, where many Jews still lived at the time of Christ’s birth. Only a remnant of the Jews returned from the Babylonian exile to Palestine during the Persian period. The wise men, most likely, were rabbis known in Hebrew as *chakamin*, which means wise men.

We are told that the wise men made their journey from the East to Bethlehem because they had seen “the star in the East” (Matt 2:1). Watching the stars was associated especially with the Feast of Tabernacles. In fact, the roof of

the booth was built with leafy branches carefully spaced so that they would screen out the sunlight without blocking the visibility of the stars. The people watched for the stars at night during the feast because of the prophecy “a star shall come out of Jacob” (Num 24:17). It is possible that it was during the Feast of Tabernacles, the special season of star watching, that the wise men saw the Messianic star and “rejoiced exceedingly with great joy” (Matt 2:10).

In the light of the foregoing considerations, most likely Christ’s birth coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles. Being the feast of thanksgiving for God’s willingness to protect His people with the tabernacle of His presence during the wilderness sojourning, it could serve fittingly to celebrate Christ’s willingness to become a human being and pitch His tent among us in order to become our Savior.

The implications of this conclusion are self-evident. The Feast of Tabernacles in late September/October provides Christians today with much more accurate Biblical timing and typology for celebrating Christ’s birth, than the pagan dating of December 25th. The latter date not only is removed from the actual time of Christ’s birth, but is also derived from the pagan celebration of the return of the sun after the winter solstice. Why celebrate the birth of Jesus at the wrong time of December 25th,—a date derived from pagan sun-worship—when the Bible provides us with a more appropriate timing and typology for commemorating such an important event?

Ellen White encourages the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles. She writes: “Well would it be for the people of God at the present time to have a Feast of Tabernacles—a joyous commemoration of the blessings of God to them. As the children of Israel celebrated the deliverance that God had wrought for their fathers, and His miraculous preservation of them during their journeying from Egypt, so should gratefully call to mind the various ways He has devised for bringing us out of the world, and from the darkness of error, into the precious light of His grace and truth.”⁶

Some Historical Support for Christ’s Birth at the Feast of Tabernacles

The connection between Christ’s birth and the Feast of Tabernacles proposed above, may at first appear astonishing, but it has been proposed not only by modern authors⁷ but also by early Christian Fathers. In his classic

study *The Bible and Liturgy*, Jean Daniélou discusses the connection between the Feast of Tabernacles and that of the Nativity in the writings of some Church Fathers.⁸ He notes, for example, that in his Sermon on the Nativity, Gregory of Nazianzus (A. D. 329-389) connects the Feast of the Nativity of December 25th with the Feast of Tabernacle: “The subject of today’s feast (25th December) is the true Feast of Tabernacles. Indeed, in this feast, the human tabernacle was built up by Him who put on human nature because of us. Our tabernacles, which were struck down by death, are raised up again by Him Who built our dwelling from the beginning. Therefore, harmonizing our voices with that of David, let us also sing the Psalm: ‘Blessed is He Who comes in the name of the Lord’ [Ps 118:26. This verse was sung during the procession of the Feast of Tabernacles].”⁹

For Gregory the Feast of Tabernacles finds its fulfillment in the Incarnation. Commenting on this text, Daniélou writes: “The coming of Christ, His birth, thus is seen to be the inauguration of the true Feast of Tabernacles. Here appears a new harmony: the *scenai* [Greek for ‘the tent’], the human dwelling at the beginning, have been struck by sin. . . . Christ comes to raise them up, to restore human nature, to inaugurate the true Feast of Tabernacles prefigured in Jewish liturgy. And the beginning of this *Scenopegia* [Feast of Tabernacles] is the Incarnation itself in which, according to St. John, Christ built the tabernacles of His own Body (John 1:14). It does indeed seem as if it were this term of St. John which makes the connection between the feast of the *scenai* [Tabernacles] and the feast of the Birth of Christ.”¹⁰

Daniélou finds that traces of the patristic connection between the Feast of Tabernacles and that of the Nativity still survive in the current use of the Messianic verses 23, 28, 29 of Psalm 118 during “the Gradual of the Second Mass of Christmas” celebrated in Catholic Churches. He concludes: “It is indeed at Christmas that the eschatological tabernacle was built for the first time, when the Word ‘established His dwelling amongst us’ and the unity of men and angels was restored when the angels visited the shepherds.”¹¹

Unfortunately, the connection between Christ’s birth and the Feast of Tabernacles was gradually lost as the pagan symbology of the sun displaced the Biblical typology of the Feast of Tabernacles. The attempt of the Fathers to connect the Feast of Tabernacles with Christmas was not successful because the two feasts differ in origin, meaning, and authority. By adopting the date of December 25th, which was the pagan feast of the birthday of the Invin-

cible Sun (*dies natalis Solis Invicti*),¹² the Christological meaning of the Feast of Tabernacles was gradually lost—as indicated by the fact that today nobody thinks of Christmas as being the antitypical fulfillment of the Feast of Tabernacles, when Christ became flesh and tabernacled with us, in order to accomplish His redemptive plan to tabernacle with us throughout eternity in the world to come.

The Pagan Origin of Date of Christmas

The adoption of the 25th of December for the celebration of Christmas is perhaps the most explicit example of Sun-worship's influence on the Christian liturgical calendar. It is a known fact that the pagan feast of the *dies natalis Solis Invicti*—the birthday of the Invincible Sun, was held on that date.¹³ Do Christian sources openly admit the borrowing of the date of such a pagan festivity? Generally not. To admit borrowing a pagan festival, even after due reinterpretation of its meaning, would be tantamount to an open betrayal of the faith. This the Fathers were anxious to avoid.

An exception is the comment of an unknown Syrian writer who wrote in the margin of the *Expositio in Evangelia of Barsalibaeus* as follows: “It was a solemn rite among the pagans to celebrate the festival of the rising of the sun on this very day, December 25th. Furthermore, to augment the solemnity of the day, they were accustomed to kindle fires, to which rites they were accustomed to invite and admit even Christian people. When therefore the Teachers observed that Christians were inclined to this custom, they contrived a council and established on this day the festival of the true Rising”¹⁴

The commemoration of the birth of the Sun-god was not easily forgotten by Christians. Augustine and Leo the Great strongly reprimanded those Christians who at Christmas worshipped the Sun rather than the birth of Christ.¹⁵ Therefore, it is well to keep in mind that in the investigation of the influence of the Sun-cults on the Christian liturgy, the most we can hope to find are not direct but indirect indications. This warning applies not only for the date of Christmas but for that of Sunday as well.

In his dissertation *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, Gaston H. Halsberghé similarly concludes: “The authors whom we consulted on this point are unanimous in admitting the influence of the pagan celebration held in honor of *Deus Sol Invictus* on the 25th of December, the *Natalis Invicti*, on the Christian celebra-

tion of Christmas. This influence is held to be responsible for the shifting to the 25th of December of the birth of Christ, which had until then been held on the day of the Epiphany, the 6th of January. The celebration of the birth of the Sun god, which was accompanied by a profusion of light and torches and the decoration of branches and small trees, had captivated the followers of the cult to such a degree that even after they had been converted to Christianity they continued to celebrate the feast of the birth of the Sun god.”¹⁶

Rome and the Origin of Sunday, Easter Sunday and Christmas

Let us note that the Church of Rome pioneered not only the observance of Sunday and Easter-Sunday, but also the new date of December 25 for the celebration of Christ’s birth. In fact the first explicit indication that on the 25th of December Christians celebrated Christ’s birthday, is found in a Roman document known as *Chronograph of 354* (a calendar attributed to Fuzious Dionysius Philocalus), where it says: “VIII Kal. Jan. natus Christus in Betleem Judaeae—On the eighth calends of January [i.e., December 25th] Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea.”¹⁷

That the Church of Rome introduced and championed this new date, is accepted by most scholars. For instance, Mario Righetti, a renowned Catholic liturgist who is the author of the standard four volumes set on *Storia Liturgica—A History of Liturgy*, writes: “After the peace the Church of Rome, to facilitate the acceptance of the faith by the pagan masses, found it convenient to institute the 25th of December as the feast of the temporal birth of Christ, to divert them from the pagan feast, celebrated on the same day in honor of the “Invincible Sun” Mithras, the conqueror of darkness.”¹⁸

In the Orient, however, the birth and the baptism of Jesus were celebrated respectively on January 5 and 6. B. Botte, a Belgian Benedictine scholar, in a significant study concludes that this date also evolved from an originally pagan feast, namely Epiphany, which commemorated the birth and growth of light.¹⁹ It was not an easy task for the Church of Rome to get the Eastern churches to accept the new date of December 25th, since many of them “firmly adhered to the practice of observing the festival of Christ’s birth in its old form as an Epiphany festival on January 5th-6th.”²⁰

It would take us beyond our immediate scope to trace the process of adoption by the various Christian communities of the Roman Christmas date of

December 25. It will be sufficient to notice that the adoption of the date of December 25th for the celebration of Christ's birth shows not only of the influence of the Sun-cult, but also of the primacy exerted by the Church of Rome in promoting the adoption of the pagan holidays of Dies Solis (the Day of the Sun) and *Natalis Solis Invicti* (the birthday of the Invincible Sun) held on December 25. The fact that both Christmas (*Christ + Mass*) and Sunday (*Dies Solis*) were pagan holy days adopted and promoted by the Catholic church, should cause Adventists to ponder on the legitimacy of their observance.

Conclusion

The birth of Jesus is of incomparable importance to the Christian faith. Without the birth of Christ there would be no baptism, death, resurrection, ascension, outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Christ's intercession in the heavenly sanctuary, and Second Advent.

The date of Christ's birth most likely coincided with the Feast of Tabernacles that falls late in September or early in October. Being the feast of thanksgiving for God's willingness to protect His people with the tabernacle of His presence during the wilderness sojourning, it could serve fittingly to celebrate Christ's willingness to become a human being and pitch His tent among us in order to become our Savior.

The time of the Feast of Tabernacles provides Christians today with a more accurate Biblical timing and typology for celebrating Christ's birth, than the pagan dating of December 25th. The latter date not only is removed from the actual time of Christ's birth, but is also derived from the pagan celebration of the birth of the Sun-god. Why celebrate Christ's birth at the wrong time of the year because of a pagan tradition, when we can observe it at the right season on the basis of sound biblical reasons?

From a biblical perspective the birth of Jesus is connected with three major themes: (1) adoration and worship (Luke 2:8-12); (2) the giving of gifts to God (Matt 2:1-11); and proclamation of peace and goodwill (Luke 2:13-14). May our celebration of Christ's birth, at any time of the year, incorporate these essential elements: worship, giving, and praise.

ENDNOTES

1. Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church* (1956), p. 35.
2. See A. T. Robertson, *A Harmony of the Gospels* (New York, 1992), p. 267.
3. See, Adam Clark, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (New York, 1956), vol. 5, p. 370.
4. Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Times* (Baltimore, MD, 1993), p. 97.
5. Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 540.
6. See, for example, Edward Chumney, *The Seven Festivals of the Messiah* (Shippensburg, PA, 1994), pp. 178-184; Barney Kasdan, *God's Appointed Times* (Baltimore, MD, 1993), pp. 95-99.
7. Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 540-541.
8. Jean Daniélou, *The Bible and Liturgy* (South Bend, IN, 1956), pp. 343-347.
9. Gregory of Nazianzus, Sermon on the Nativity, *Patrologia Graeca* 46, 1129 B-C, translated by Jean Daniélou (note 7), p. 345.
10. Jean Daniélou (note 8), p. 345.
11. Jean Daniélou (note 8), p. 347.
12. For a study of the influence of sun-worship on the Christian adoption of December 25 for the celebration of Christ's birth, see my dissertation, *From Sabbath to Sunday. A Historical Investigation of the Rise of Sunday Observance in Early Christianity* (Rome, Italy, 1977), pp. 256-261.
13. In the Philocalian calendar (A.D. 354) the 25th of December is designated as "N[atalis] Invicti—The birthday of the invincible one" (CIL I, part 2, p. 236); Julian the Apostate, a nephew of Constantine and a devotee of Mithra, says regarding this pagan festival: "Before the beginning of the year, at the end of the month which is called after Saturn [December], we celebrate in honor of Helios [the Sun] the most splendid games, and we dedicate the festival to the Invincible Sun. That festival may the ruling gods grant me to praise and to celebrate with sacrifice! And above all the others may Helios [the Sun] himself, the king of all, grant me this" (Julian, *The Orations of Julian, Hymn to King Helios* 155, LCL p. 429); Franz Cumont, *Astrology and Religion Among Greeks and Romans*, 1960, p. 89: "A very general observance required that on the 25th of December the birth of the 'new Sun' should be celebrated, when after the winter solstice the days began to lengthen and the 'invincible' star triumphed again over darkness";

for texts on the Mithraic celebration of Dec. 25th see CIL I, p. 140; Gordon J. Laing, *Survivals of Roman Religion*, 1931, pp. 58-65, argues persuasively that many of the customs of the ancient Roman Saturnalia (Dec. 17-23) were transferred to the Christmas season.

14. J. S. Assemanus, *Bibliotheca orientalis* 2, 164, trans. by P. Cotton, *From Sabbath to Sunday*, 1933, pp. 144-145.

15. Augustine, *Sermo in Nativitate Domini* 7, PL 38, 1007 and 1032, enjoins Christians to worship at Christmas not the sun but its Creator; Leo the Great rebukes those Christians who at Christmas celebrated the birth of the sun rather than that of Christ (Sermon 27, *In Nativitate Domini*, PL 54, 218).

16. Gaston H. Halsberghe, *The Cult of Sol Invictus*, 1972, p. 174.

17. T. Mommsen, *Chronography of Philocalus of the Year 354*, 1850, p. 631; L. Duchesne, *Bulletin critique*, 1890, p. 41, has established that the calendar goes back to 336, because the *Depositio martyrum* is preceded in the Philocalian by the *Depositum episcoporum* of Rome, which lists Sylvester (d. A.D. 335) as the last pope.

18. Mario Righetti, *Manuale di Storia Liturgica*, 1955, II, p. 67.

19. B. Botte, "Les Denominations du dimanche dans la tradition chrétienne," *Le Dimanche, Lex Orandi* 39, 1965, pp. 14ff.

20. Oscar Cullmann, *The Early Church*, 1956, p.32.

WILL THE PRESENCE AND POWER OF ISLAM GROW DURING THE OBAMA ADMINISTRATION?

You will find my answer to this question at the end of this newsletter. You should find my discussion of this question informative, though you may not agree with everything I wrote. That is not a problem. My goal is to cause people to look at issues from a broader perspective.

A few readers of the last newsletter 217, took issue with me about my comments on possible expansion of the presence and power of Islam during the next four years of the Obama's administration. I come from Rome, but I do not claim infallibility. I can only claim that I have given considerable thought to this subject. The credibility of my prediction will soon be tested during the next four years. I would appeal to those who disagree with me, not to become disagreeable. Just be patient and watch for the Signs of the Times. At the end of the next four years, please get back to me and tell me if I was right

or wrong in interpreting the role of the Papacy and Islam in the final showdown over worship.

Movie About Muhammad in the Making

A movie drama about the life of the Prophet Mohammad is soon to go into production. The movie is entitled “Messenger of Peace,” and aims at promoting Islam as a religion of peace. Some predict that this movie will rival the influence of Mel Gibson’s “The Passion of the Christ.”

Robert Spencer writes: “If film producer Oscar Zoghbi has his way, Americans will be soon be flocking to movie theaters to see a film about the Prophet Muhammad and his followers that Zoghbi hopes will clear up misconceptions about Muslims, including what he says is ‘the understanding that all Muslims are terrorists.’ . . .

“Zoghbi says he hopes to shoot some scenes for his movie in the holy cities of Medina and Mecca, and he predicts his film, ‘The Messenger of Peace,’ will rival Mel Gibson’s ‘The Passion of The Christ.’”

One wonder, will the movie justify Muhammad’s violent and unprovoked slaughtering of 600 to 900 Jews in Medina (627 A. D) who rejected him as prophet? Will the movie quote some of the “Sword Verses” of the Koran as this: “But when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every stratagem (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practice regular charity, then open the way for them: for God is Oft-forgiving, Most Merciful (9:5)”?

The impact of the movie remains to be seen, but if it promotes Muhammad and Islam as a religion of peace, ignoring the bloody massacres carried out by Muslims during their wars of expansion, then the viewers will be fed a distorted version of Islam.

The Mumbai Massacre

During the pass few days the Mumbai atrocities presented by the British media have made me forcefully aware of the fact that Islamic

fundamentalist pose a global threat, even to America. In England new security measures have been implemented. For example, flights cannot land before 6:00 a.m. Loudspeakers in the underground trains periodically warn passengers to report any suspicious activity.

Let me quote from an article that offers insights into the global implication of the Mumbai massacre: “The Mumbai atrocities show very clearly what too many in Britain obdurately deny — that a war is being waged against civilization. It is both global and local. It is not ‘our’ fault; it has nothing to do with Muslim poverty, oppression or discrimination.

“The Islamic fundamentalist fanatics use specific grievances — Kashmir, Iraq, Palestine, Chechnya — merely as recruiting sergeants for their worldwide holy war against all ‘unbelievers’.

“The Mumbai attackers targeted British, American and Indian citizens simply because they wanted to kill as many British, American and Indian ‘unbelievers’ as possible. Where they found Muslims, they spared them.

“This was not, as is so often described, ‘mindless violence’. On the contrary, the terrorists precisely calibrated both their choice of targets and the way in which they attacked them. This tells us many things.

. . .

“They wish to destroy the ever more vital strategic alliance between India and the West in common defence against the Islamist onslaught. That was why British and American visitors in those two grand hotels were singled out. And that was why Mumbai itself was chosen — as the symbol of India’s burgeoning commerce and prosperity and its links with the West.

“The manner of these attacks also carried a message. Many hostages were taken, but no attempt was made to use them to demand redress of any grievances. They were simply killed. That made a statement that the terrorists’ agenda is non-negotiable.

“The attacks demonstrated, above all, the reach of the perpetrators and the impotence of their designated victims. Those who believe

that Islamist terror can be halted by addressing grievances around the world are profoundly mistaken. With these atrocities, moreover, Islamist attacks have moved much closer to war than conventional terrorism.” (<http://dogfightatbankstown.typepad.com/blog/2008>).

Mumbai: A Message for America

In a perceptive article in *American Thinker*, Abraham H. Miller, emeritus professor of political science, University of Cincinnati, and a former counter-terrorist consultant to the US Department of Justice, writes: “Americans have been assured that the horror and terror that exploded across television screens from Mumbai in late November will not affect our own sense of security. Such assurances are as disingenuous as they are comforting. The murders carried out against Western tourists in India’s most technologically sophisticated city, have far-reaching implications for Americans, not just for those of us traveling abroad, but for all of us getting up everyday and going about life’s routines.

“Those who have prescribed this analgesic of comfort have focused on where this event took place. Far and away more important are the terrorists’ strategies and tactics.

“The attacks were carried out almost simultaneously on multiple targets. Airing during the Thanksgiving holiday, the attacks were designed to draw major media attention in America. The targeting and execution showed sophistication, extensive planning, and precision training. “

“What few politicians will say publicly is that the terrorists will see these incidents as data points, probes, and simulations for the inevitable next events. And while we are being reassured that the events in Mumbai will have no implications for our future, terrorists are already planning our future against the lessons of Mumbai. (December 2, 2008).

These developments reminds us of Paul’s prediction: “While the people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape” (! Thess5:3).

ANNOUNCEMENTS OF SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

UPCOMING SEMINARS FOR DECEMBER

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the seminars scheduled for the month of December 2008. We wish to extend a warm welcome to those of you who live close to the location of our seminars. Our new seminars with Words and Songs will touch your heart and expand your mind.

NOVEMBER 28: LONDON, ENGLAND FULHAM SDA CHURCH

Location: 259 Lillie Road, Fulham, SW6 7LL

For directions and information call Pastor Cline De Silva at 0208 384 1710

NOVEMBER 29: LONDON, ENGLAND CORNERSTONE SDA CHURCH

Location: Paul Robeson Theater, Treaty Centre, High Street, Hounslow, TW3 1ES

For directions and information call Pastor Cline De Silva at 0208 384 1710

NOVEMBER 30: LONDON, ENGLAND FULHAM SDA CHURCH

Location: The Brunswick Club, 34 Haldane Road, Fulham SW6 7EU

For directions and information call Pastor Cline De Silva at 0208 384 1710

DECEMBER 5-6: LONDON STONEBRIDGE SDA CHURCH

Location: St. Margaret & St. George's United Reform and Moravian Church, Nicoll Road, Harlesden, London NW10 9AX

For directions and information call Pastor Michael Mannix at 07958 743661

DECEMBER 12-13: EL SOBRANTE-APIAN WAY SDA CHURCH

Location: 980 Appian Way, El Sobrante, California 94803

For direction and information call Pasto Jim Mamanua at (510) 724-3477

SPANISH TRANSLATION OF *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

Hispanic readers of *Biblical Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* have been urging me to translate and publish the book in Spanish as soon as possible. In fact, some of them have raised the money to pay for the translation, editing, artwork, and lay-out of the book.

The translation has been completed by Claudia Blath, a professional translator of the Asociacion Casa Editora Sudamericana. She has produced an excellent translation in a record time. The Spanish edition *LAS CREENCIAS POPULARES, ¿SON BÍBLICAS?* came off the press a few days ago. We are now shipping the book across the USA and overseas. You can see the cover of the Spanish book and read a description by clicking at this link: <http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/spanpop>

To facilitate a massive distribution of *Las Creencias Populares, ¿Son Bíblicas?* we are offering the book at a special price of \$5.00 per copy on quantity orders. For details click at this link http://www.biblicalpherspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26_39 or call us at (269) 471-2915 or call us at (269) 471-2915.

Your personal effort to inform Hispanic pastors and believers about the availability of *Las Creencias Populares, ¿Son Bíblicas?* is much appreciated.

UPDATE ON *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

The third printing of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* came out few days ago. We have now resumed the shipment to churches and institutions in the USA and overseas.

Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical? is proving to be by far the most popular and best-selling book I have written. The reason is that the book meets the urgent need for a witnessing publication that Adventists can give with confidence to people inquiring about our faith.

Many Adventists have emailed me messages of appreciation, saying that they have waited for years for a book like *Popular Beliefs* that shows why the

most popular Catholic and Protestant popular beliefs are unbiblical, while the less-popular Adventist beliefs are biblically correct.

***Popular Beliefs* Adopted by Adventist Colleges and Seminaries**

Popular Beliefs is widely used not only for witnessing, but also for teaching at our colleges and theological seminaries. For example, we received orders from the School of Theology of Friedensau Adventist University in Germany. Prof. Denis Fortin, Dean of our Andrews University Theological Seminary, requested a supply for the class he teaches on Roman Catholic Theology.

Several professors told me that ***Popular Beliefs*** is ideal for some of their Bible classes, because it traces the historical origin and theological development of the major Catholic and Protestant heresies popular today.

As a church historian by training and profession, I have spent 15 months tracing historically and examining biblically 10 popular beliefs (heresies) in a calm, objective, and non-confrontational way. The ultimate goal is to lead rath-seekers to appreciate the biblical validity and contemporary relevance of our Adventist beliefs.

Has your Church Received a Supply of *Popular Beliefs*?

If your church has not yet received a supply of ***Popular Beliefs***, we will be glad to send you at this time as many copies as needed, since we have just received the third printing.

Popular Beliefs is an ideal gift for any non-SDA attending evangelistic meetings this Fall. As you know, evangelistic lectures can only touch on the highlights of our message, leaving many questions unanswered in the mind of the visitors. ***Popular Beliefs*** fill in the gaps by offering compelling answers to frequently asked questions.

To make it possible for many Adventist Churches to use ***Popular Beliefs*** for evangelistic outreach and for the personal growth, we offer the book at this time for only \$6.60 per copy for a case of 30 copies, instead of the regular price of \$30.00 per copy. This means that for \$200.00, your church can order a case of 30 copies of ***Popular Beliefs***. We will pay the mail expenses to

US destinations. The details for ordering the book are given at the end of the newsletter or by clicking at this link: http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26_35 or call us at (269) 471-2915.

Two Copies for the Price of One

At this time I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to all the pastors and lay-members who have actively promoted and distributed *Popular Beliefs* to their church members. Without your promotional efforts, the book would not have been reprinted three times in three months.

To make it possible for all our pastors and local church leaders to become acquainted with this timely book, we are offering until October 31, 2008, two copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are They Biblical?* for the price of one. This means that for \$30.00 you can order two copies, one for yourself and to give to your pastor or a local church leader.

After reading *Popular Beliefs* many pastors have ordered the book by the case of 30 copies for only \$6.60 per copy. Many churches have ordered 100 copies at the special offer of \$5.00 per copy, to give to non-SDA attending the Mark Findley's Satellite program *Discoveries 2008* or other evangelistic meeting in the Fall.

But, there are still many pastors and churches that are unaware of the release of this powerful witnessing book *Popular Beliefs*. This newsletter reaches only about 35,000 readers. Thus I need your help in promoting this timely book.

Thank you for introducing your pastor and local church officers to this timely book. To facilitate your effort, I am offering you two copies for the price of one. The details for ordering the book are given at the end of the newsletter or by clicking at this link: http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26_35 or call us at (269) 471-2915.

SPECIAL OFFER ON *POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?*

To facilitate a massive circulation of *Popular Beliefs*, I have decided to continue to offer the book at the following substantially discounted prices:

2 copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* for the price of one, namely \$30.00 for two copies. Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$10.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

10 copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* at \$10.00 per copy, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$30.00 (\$100.00 for 10 copies). Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$50.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

30 copies (one case) of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* at \$6.65 per copy (\$200.00 for 30 copies). Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$100.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

100 copies of *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* at \$5.00 per copy, postage paid. (\$500.00 for 100 copies). Mailing expenses are included for the USA. Add \$300.00 for AIRMAIL postage to any overseas destination.

NOTE: We can ship by sea-freight up to 1000 copies of *Popular Beliefs* (that is, up to a cubic meter) to any foreign destinations for only \$500.00. This reduces the cost of mailing to only €50 per book. Fee free to contact me for further details.

HOW TO ORDER POPULAR BELIEFS: ARE THEY BIBLICAL?

You can order *Popular Beliefs: Are they Biblical?* in four different ways:

(1) ONLINE: By clicking here: http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/cart/catalog/index.php?cPath=26_35

(2) PHONE: By calling us at (269) 471-2915 to give us your credit card number and postal address.

(3) EMAIL: By emailing your order to <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>. Be sure to provide your postal address, credit card number, and expiration date.

(4) REGULAR MAIL: By mailing a check to BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103, USA. We guarantee to process your order as soon as we receive it.

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AN INCREDIBLE OFFER!!!

THE COMPLETE PACKAGE OF 14 DVD/CD ALBUMS FOR ONLY \$150.00, INSTEAD OF THE REGULAR ONLINE PRICE OF \$1650.00.

This offer may sound too good to be true. At this time we are offering together as a package all the 14 DVD/CD albums which contains 41 live, video lectures for only \$150.00, instead of \$1650.00.

This package contains 41 professionally recorded live, video lectures with all the lectures of Prof. Bacchiocchi, Prof. Jon Paulien, Prof. Roy Gane, Prof. Graeme Bradford, and Soprano Cristina Piccardi.

Until now these recordings were sold separately, costing considerably more. But to make it possible for many to benefit from all these timely messages, we offer them together as a package for only \$150.00, instead of the regular price of \$1650.00.

You can view the picture of all the 14 ALBUMS and read a detailed description of them, just by clicking at this link:<http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/albumoffer.htm>

The Package Includes the Following 14 Albums:

1) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI AND CRISTINA PICCARDI'S DVD Album with Sabbath Seminar with Words and Songs recorded at the Loma Linda SDA church. The album contains three DVD disks with 6 hours of lectures and sacred songs.

2) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S newly recorded DVD ALBUM called ABUNDANT LIFE SEMINAR. The album contains 2 video powerpoint lectures: The Christian and Alcoholic Beverages and How to Build a Happy and Lasting Marriage. These two lectures summarize the highlights of Bacchiocchi's two books Wine in the Bible and The Marriage Covenant. Two separate files with 225 powerpoint slides are included.

3) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM containing 10 video powerpoint lectures on the SABBATH/ADVENT SEMINAR. Some of the lectures show the documents Prof. Bacchiocchi found in Vatican libraries on the role of the papacy in changing the Sabbath to Sunday. This album contains the popular powerpoint SABBATH/ADVENT seminars Prof. Bacchiocchi presents in many countries.

4) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM on CRACKING THE DA VINCI CODE. The album contains a two hours video lecture, professionally taped with a virtual studio as a background. A separate file with 200 powerpoint slides is included. The two video lectures reveal the prophetic significance of Dan Brown's neo-pagan false worship promoted through his book and film. The two hours video lectures will help you appreciate the role that The Da Vinci Code plays in the prophetic endtime battle between true and false worship.

5) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM on THE MARK AND NUMBER OF THE BEAST. The album contains two hours professionally recorded video lecture and a separate powerpoint file with the 200 slides used for the lecture. The project was commissioned by Prof. Jon Paulien

and Prof. Ranko Stefanovich, who are the foremost authorities on the book of Revelation. With the help of 200 beautiful slides the video lecture shows the origin and historical use of 666. You will see stunning pictures of papal tiaras, including disputed one with the pope's title *Vicarius Filii Dei*.

6) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S CD ALBUM with all his BOOKS AND POWERPOINT LECTURES. The album consists of two disks. The first disk has all his 20 books and over 200 articles. The second disk has the 2000 slides and script of 25 of Prof. Bacchiocchi's popular PowerPoint presentations.

7) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S DVD ALBUM on THE PASSION OF CHRIST. The album contains the 2 hours live interview conducted by 3ABN on Prof. Bacchiocchi's book *The Passion of Christ in Scripture and History*. The live video interview show that that this movie is a strict Catholic film that in a subtle and deceptive way promotes fundamental Catholic heresies.

8) PROF. BACCHIOCCHI'S MP3 AUDIO ALBUM which contains 2 disks with 22 AUDIO LECTURES on on Marriage, Music, Temperance, Dress, Sabbath, Second Advent, State of the Dead, and others. You can enjoy these lectures while driving, working, or relaxing. Ideal for listening in your car while driving.

9) PROF. JON PAULIEN'S newly released DVD ALBUM video seminar on *Simply Revelation*. The four live video lectures focus on the essential messages of Revelation and their relevance for today. This mini Revelation Seminar will offer you and your congregation fresh insights into the Book of Revelation. Currently, Prof. Paulien is preparaing a new Revelation Seminar at the request of the General Conference

10) PROF. JON PAULIEN'S CD ALBUM with a dozen of his books, and all his articles. You will find in this collection a priceless resource to enrich your understanding and experience of biblical truths. Prof. Paulien examines fundamental biblical beliefs in a profound and yet popular way. He is a recognized expert on the book of Revelation. Several of his books will help you to unlock the secrets of Revelation.

11) PROF. GRAEME BRADFORD'S DVD ALBUM with a two hours video lecture on Ellen White. He shares the highlights of his book *More than a Prophet*. The album contains also Prof. Bradford's the publications and articles. A searchable data base enables you to access Prof. Graeme Bradford's published and unpublished writings, including his the latest book *More than a Prophet*.

12) CRISTINA PICCARDI'S CD ALBUM REJOICE IN THE LORD. The album consists of 11 sacred songs recorded with Marcelo Caceres, Professor of piano at Andrews University. The CD Album includes Gospel songs like How Great Thou Art, He Shall Feed His Flock, Softly and Tenderly, The Holy City, etc. You can play this audio recording in your car CD player, or on any CD or DVD players you have in your home.

13) CRISTINA PICCARDI'S DVD ALBUM SING UNTO THE LORD. This DVD Album contains 12 sacred familiar songs that were recorded during a live sacred concert presented at Andrews University Pioneer Memorial Church. This is a video recording that you can enjoy in your living room and play in your church.

14) CRISTINA PICCARDI'S DVD ALBUM BY HIS GRACE. This DVD album consists of 16 sacred songs recorded in Loma Linda with four high-definition cameras. The songs cover the major themes of God's creative and redemptive love. Her marvellous singing will touch your heart and inspire you to devote your life more fully to the Savior.

FOUR WAYS TO ORDER THE 14 ALBUMS PACKAGE

You can order the complete package of 14 DVD/CD Albums, which contain 41 live video lectures and powerful soprano singing, for only \$150.00, instead of the regular online price of \$1650.00, in four different ways:

(1) ONLINE: By clicking here: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com/albumoffer.htm>

(2) PHONE: By calling us at (269) 471-2915 to give us your credit card number and postal address.

(3) EMAIL: By emailing your order to <sbacchiocchi@biblicalperspectives.com>. Be sure to provide your postal address, credit card number, and expiration date. For security reasons, you can email your credit card number in two separate messages. In the first message you email me the first 8 digits and in the second message the last 8 digits, plus the expiration date. Be sure to include your postal address.

(4) REGULAR MAIL: By mailing a check for \$150.00 to BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 4990, USA. We guarantee to process your order immediately.

INCREDIBLE NEW OFFERS ON HITACHI PROJECTORS

HITACHI has released the new CP-X401 3000 lumens projector, which has an impressive high resolution, low fan noise, and a wealth of connectivity options. The most impressive feature of this projector is the incredible price of **only \$1000.00** to help especially our churches and schools in developing countries. The projector can be purchased with or without accessories such as the REMOTE PRESENTER to control the flow of images in the lap-top.

To receive detail information about this projector as well as on other models offered to us by HITACHI at a substantially discounted price, feel free to call us at (269) 471-2915.

DOES YOUR CHURCH OR SCHOOL NEED A SCREEN?

If your church/school is looking for a screen, the DA-LITE SCREEN COMPANY, the largest manufacture of screens in the world, has agreed to offer their line of screens to our Adventist churches and schools at about 30%