

# **A New Attack Against The Sabbath - Part 3**

## **Endtime Issues No. 78**

**12 December 2001**

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.

Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

### **Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:**

The controversy over the Sabbath is intensifying. During the past few weeks I received an unusual numbers of requests for my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE* from Adventists who want to help fellow-believers who are questioning the Sabbath. These developments cause us to ask: Why is the Sabbath commandment so controversial? Why over 3000 treatises have been written about the Sabbath since the time of the Reformation, when none of the other nine commandments have been under the crossfire of controversy?

Most likely the reason is that the Sabbath commandment touches us in our intimacy more than the other nine, by summoning us to consecrate our time to God. Most people are very touchy about their time. They want to use their Sabbath time to seek for pleasure and profit, rather than for the peace and presence of God.

The last two newsletters (No. 76 and 77) have generated an unusual number of positive responses. Not only lay persons but also Bible teachers and pastors have expressed sincere appreciation for these essays which respond to the latest attack against the Sabbath. Here at Andrews University a good number of seminary students have subscribed to the ENDTIME ISSUES newsletter in order to receive these essays.

Particularly grateful for these Bible studies are our overseas Bible teachers who have limited resources. Several of them have reassured me that they are printing these studies and making them available to their students. For me it is encouraging to know that the long hours I spend preparing these newsletters are not in vain. I wish I had more time and help to edit them before sending them out.

Among those who receive these newsletters are several ministers of different denominations. Some of them often ask me pertinent questions. I consider it a privilege to be able to dialogue through this newsletter with church leaders of other faiths. My problem is the lack of time to provide comprehensive answers to the many questions asked.

## ARE THESE NEWSLETTERS DEFAMATORY OF PASTOR TAYLOR?

In a letter dated November 12, 2001 and addressed to Dale Ratzlaff, Pastor Taylor accuses me of "character assassination." Ratzlaff emailed this letter to all his subscribers. Let me respond to the accusation simply by stating that it has never been my intent to defame anyone, in particular Pastor Taylor's character. As a Bible scholar my concern is to examine the validity of his arguments for rejecting the Sabbath, and not to attack his moral integrity.

The figures I provided about the actual church growth during the 8 years of Pastor Taylor's ministry at the Foster Memorial SDA Church and of the slight increase in church attendance since his resignations, were supplied to me by the President of the Carolina Conference and two local elders. I simply stated what I was told as a corrective to the figures given in the "Open Letter." I have no desire to waste my time to find out who is right and who is wrong. The only thing I can say is that there are two sides to the story.

My observation that "Pastor Taylor may suffer from mental and emotional instability, which makes him easily victim of questionable teachings," was simply based on my reading of his spiritual journey. Many readers of his "Open Letter" have reached the same conclusion, because Pastor Taylor admits that his confidence in the soundness of the Adventist beliefs was shaken by every major event or crisis that he experienced.

Mentally stable individuals are not easily swayed in their religious beliefs by every major crisis or events. My acceptance of the fundamental Adventist beliefs is not based on what our pioneers taught in the past or on what critics may say today, but on testing their soundness by the normative authority of Scripture. This does not mean that I see no need for improvement in our Adventist belief structure.

Those who read my newsletters have noticed that I do propose improvements in the theological formulation of our Adventist beliefs. For example, in ENDTIME ISSUES No. 74, I propose to broaden the typological basis of the Pre-Advent Judgment, by including the Feast of Trumpets. The reason for this proposal is the fact that in OT times the judgment process began on the first day of the seventh month with the Feast of Trumpets and terminated ten days later on the Day of Atonement. The awareness of certain deficiencies in the doctrinal formulation of some Adventist beliefs, does not diminish my confidence in the overall truthfulness and timeliness of our Adventist message.

The accusation of "character assassination" is clearly discredited by what I wrote in the last newsletter about Pastor Taylor: "I have no doubts in my mind that Pastor Taylor sincerely believes that he did the right thing in rejecting some fundamental Adventist beliefs and resigning from the ministry. . . . Frankly, I admire sincere people like Pastor Taylor who stand for their religious convictions, even if it means suffering financial loss and an uncertain future."

My admiration for Pastor Taylor must not deter me from examining his "New Covenant" theology in the light of the normative authority of the Bible. This has been the objective of my response to his anti-Sabbath arguments. It is my fervent hope and prayer that this dialogue will help Pastor Taylor and many sincere people to appreciate more fully the validity and value of God's Holy Sabbath day for our tension-filled and restless lives today.

## REDISCOVERY OF THE SABBATH BY A SALVATION ARMY CHURCH

Every week I receive encouraging reports about ministers and churches who are rediscovering the Sabbath. This past week I received a report about a Salvation Army Church in Grant Pass, OR, that now meets on Saturday. The report was sent to me by Mark Kellner, a columnist for several newspapers, including *Los Angeles Times* and *Washington Times*. Kellner joined our Adventist church few years ago after attending a crusade conducted by Elder John Carter in Los Angeles. I met him personally during a weekend seminar in Los Angeles. He is a most gracious man who offered to take me to and from the hotel. He served for 19 years as an officer of the Salvation Army before joining the Adventist Church.

Kellner reports that "The Salvation Army in Grants Pass, Oregon, is now holding its principal weekly worship service on the Sabbath . . . These moves have been approved by the divisional commander (equivalent of an Adventist conference president), Major Paul Seiler."

Capt. Roger Davis, the leader of the Grant Pass Salvation Army congregation, informed me in a telephone conversation that he was led to the acceptance of the Sabbath by reading my four Sabbath books. His original intent was to challenge the validity of the Sabbath, but the more he read my Sabbath books and the more he became convinced of the validity and value of the Sabbath for our Christian life today. He took my Sabbath books with him on a trip to Scotland where he found many Christians speaking of Sunday as the Christian Sabbath. The reading convinced him that Sunday is not the Sabbath. The two days differ in origin, meaning, and authority.

Capt. Roger Davis decided to accept the Sabbath and to share his new found conviction with his congregations. Some of his members reacted negatively and reported to his divisional commander, Major Paul Seiler, that he was teaching sectarian heresies. Eventually Major Seiler visited with Capt. Davis and his congregation, and accepted their decision to worship on Saturday.

During the telephone conversation I found Capt. Davis to be a sincere and warm Christian, eager to live by the principles that God has revealed. He told me that he would love to attend my SABBATH SEMINAR, if I am ever going to be in the Grant Pass area. I plan to explore the possibility to present a SABBATH SEMINAR at our Grant Pass SDA Church, sometimes during 2002. Capt. Davis is eager to invite his congregation to attend the seminar.

I would like to thank Mark Kellner for informing me about Capt. Davis and his Salvation Army congregation who recently accepted the Sabbath. Let me close this report quoting these inspiring words from Kellner himself: "I believe this is a tremendous first step for The Salvation Army, and as one who spent 19 years a church member there, I pray that more Salvation Army units will follow. At this juncture, I cannot but help think of what the pen of inspiration said about the Army, in words that can now truly be seen as prophetic:

'There are precious, self-sacrificing souls in the Salvation Army. We are to treat them kindly. There are in the Army honest souls, who are sincerely serving the Lord, and who will see greater light, advancing to the acceptance of all truth. The Salvation Army workers are trying to save the neglected, downtrodden ones. Discourage them not. Let them do that class of work by their own methods and in their own way.'" Ellen G. White, *Welfare Ministry*, page 251).

## **SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER !**

The response to the SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER I gave over a month ago on my books and recording, has been well-received by many of our subscribers. For the sake of the several hundred new subscribers, let me extend to all again the SPECIAL CHRISTMAS OFFER on all my books and recordings:

1) FIVE BOOKS OF YOUR CHOICE out of the 16 books that I have authored, for only \$50.00, postage paid, instead of the regular price of \$100.00. You can see and read chapters from all my books at my website: [www.biblicalperspectives.com](http://www.biblicalperspectives.com) The five books I would highly recommend as Christmas ideal gifts are:

**THE MARRIAGE COVENANT:** A timely book designed to strengthen the Christian home through a recovery of vital Biblical principles.

**THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC:** A much needed book to understand the Biblical teachings on worship music.

**THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE:** A most timely study that refutes the latest attacks against the Sabbath.

**IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION?** A timely book that unmasks the popular deception of conscious life after death.

**THE ADVENT HOPE:** An important book to understand the biblical teachings on the certainty and imminence of Christ Return.

2) THE TWO CD-ROMS newly released. The first CD-ROM contains my 16 books, the KJV of the Bible, and over 100 essays I have produced during the past 30 years of biblical research. With the ACROBAT search engine you can find immediately what I have written on any topic or Bible text. This CD is a marvelous tool for Bible study.

The second CD-ROM contains all my popular PowerPoint seminars presentations on the Sabbath and Second Advent. Each lecture is illustrated with over 100 colorful slides. The text explaining each slide comes with the PowerPoint program itself and can be printed separately. This makes it possible for anyone to use and modify my lectures. I have spent over 1000 hours on this project which I will endeavor to complete it within the next two weeks.

The price for each CD-ROM is only \$70.00, but your Christmas offer for the two CD-ROMS together is only \$100.00, airmailing expenses included. This means that you save \$40.00 when you order the two CD-ROMS together. You can order the five books or the two CD-ROMs by emailing us your credit card number, or by calling us at (616) 471-2915 or by mailing your check to: BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVES, 4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, Michigan 49103.

## **UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS**

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the months of December 2001 and January 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great privilege for me to meet our subscribers who travel considerable distances to attend the seminars. Feel free to contact me at (616) 471-2915 for a special seminar in your area sometimes during 2002. I still have a few openings for 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style are now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

### **DECEMBER 7-8: ROCK HILL SDA CHURCH, SOUTH CAROLINA**

Location: 255 Neely Store Road, Rock Hill, SC 29732  
For information call Pastor Werner Gil at (803) 329-4740

### **DECEMBER 14-15: WENATCHEE, WA - VALLEY VIEW SDA CHURCH**

Location: 1201 NE 10th Street, East Wenatchee, WA 98802  
For information call Pastor John Witcombe at (509) 667-1177 or (509) 670-0580

### **DECEMBER 21-23: ORLANDO, GUILGAL SDA CHURCH**

Location: 2909 North Pine Hill Road, Orlando, Florida 32808  
For information call Pastor Ronald Jean Baptiste at (407) 296-8941 or (407) 578-1488  
This is a special rally for the 1500 plus Haitian Adventists in the Orlando area.

### **DECEMBER 28-29: DAYTONA BEACH SDA CHURCH, FLORIDA**

Location: 401 N. Williamson Boulevard, Daytona Beach, Florida 32114  
For information call La Donna Bond, at (386) 749-2777 or  
Dr. James Arocho at (386) 672-4085

### **JANUARY 4-5: DELTONA SDA CHURCH, FLORIDA**

Location: 1717 Catalina Boulevard, Deltona, Florida 32738  
For information call Pastor Dan Francisco at (386) 532-3705 or (386) 789-7800

### **JANUARY 11-12: LOS ANGELES SPANISH-AMERICAN CHURCH**

Location: 1815 Bridge Street, Los Angeles, CA 90033  
For information call Pastor Giddell Garcia at (512) 695-8251 or (323) 222-7063  
This is a special rally for the Hispanic churches in the Los Angeles area.

### **JANUARY 18-19: ST. PETERSBURG FIRST SDA CHURCH**

Location: 1001 56th Street North, St. Petersburg, FL 33710  
For information call Pastor John Wolfe at (727) 865-0613 or (727) 345-1742

### **JANUARY 25-26: OKANAGAN ADVENTIST ACADEMY**

Location: 1035 Hollywood Road, Kelowna, British Columbia, Canada  
For information call Pastor Robert Lemon at (250) 766-3737 or (250) 878-5663  
This will be a mini-campmeeting for all the churches in the Kelowna district.

## **THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE**

Every week we process over 150 new subscriptions 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 they can receive this newsletter directly simply by emailing us their request at: <sbacchiocchi@qtm.net> As a result of your promotional endeavors over 14,000 people are already benefiting from these Bible studies.

**ENDTIME ISSUES 78: A NEW ATTACK AGAINST THE SABBATH - Part 3**  
**Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,**  
**Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University**

This newsletter continues and completes the examination of Pastor Greg Taylor's "Open Letter to Our Friends and Family." In the previous two newsletters (Numbers 76-77), we looked first at his religious journey, and then at his interpretation of Colossians 2:16-17 and Galatians 3 and 4. The conclusion of our analysis is that Pastor Taylor's attempt to interpret these Pauline passages as a condemnation of the principle of Sabbathkeeping, is totally devoid of textual and contextual support. We have seen that Paul opposes, not the principle of Sabbathkeeping, but the perverted use of cultic observances which were designed to promote salvation as a human achievement rather than as a divine gift of grace.

The fundamental problem we have found in Pastor Taylor's methodology is his arbitrary interpretation of few controversial texts to prove Paul's rejection of the Law in general and of the Sabbath in particular. A responsible method of Biblical interpretation requires an analysis of ALL the relevant Pauline statements about the law. Had Pastor Taylor followed this method, he would have discovered that Paul rejects the law as a method of salvation but upholds it as a moral standard for Christian conduct.

This newsletter continues the examination of Pastor Taylor's use of selected Bible texts to support his termination view of the Sabbath. It is with deep sadness that I continue this analysis, because it is painful to see how clear biblical teachings are twisted, through an arbitrary interpretation of selected Bible texts. This problem, which is common in the anti-Sabbath literature produced by former Adventists, highlights the need to improve the teaching of Biblical interpretation in our ministerial program. Reading this anti-Sabbath literature has reminded me of the frustration I have often experienced during the past 30 years of teaching, while grading term papers by theology students who had yet to learn the fundamental principles of Biblical interpretation.

**PASTOR TAYLOR'S INTERPRETATION OF ROMANS 14:5-6**

After Colossians 2:16-17 and Galatians 3:16-29; 4:9:11, Pastor Taylor submits Romans 14:5-6, as the next text to support his abrogation view of the Sabbath. The text reads: "One man esteems one day as better than another, while another man esteems all the days alike. Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind. He who observes the day, observes it in honor of the Lord. He also who eats, eats in honor of the Lord, since he gives thanks to God; while he who abstains, abstains in honor of the Lord and gives thanks to God" (Rom 14:5-6). Pastor Taylor quotes the text from the KJV which adds the phrase "he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it." This phrase is omitted in modern translations like the RSV and NIV, because it is not found in the most ancient manuscripts.

Without examining the nature of the conflict addressed by Paul in these verses, Pastor Taylor jumps to this conclusion: "the sacredness of days is no longer an issue for Christians. . . Paul makes the Sabbath a non-issue for New Testament Christians. His instructions have some strong implications for those of us who have, in the past, made Sabbath a 'saving truth' and one that we judge the 'loyalty' of others by. I had to take a hard look at some of the things I have taught in the past."

This conclusion misrepresents the Adventist understanding of the Sabbath and grossly misinterprets the Pauline passage. The Adventist Church has never made the Sabbath a "saving truth" in the sense that its observance secures salvation. We are saved not by observing a day, the Sabbath, but by accepting Christ's atoning sacrifice. However, honoring the Savior on His Holy Day does reveal our loyalty to Him, because the way we use our Sabbath time is indicative of our priorities.

### Three Major Flaws

Pastor Taylor's claim that in Romans 14:5-6 Paul teaches that "the sacredness of days is no longer an issue for Christians. . .the Sabbath [is] a non-issue for New Testament Christians," is faulty for three major reasons. First, Paul is not addressing the question of the Mosaic law in general or of the Sabbath in particular. The conflict between the "weak" and the "strong" over diet and days cannot be traced back to the Mosaic law. The "weak man" who "eats only vegetables" (Rom 14:2) and "esteems one day as better [apparently for fasting] than another" (Rom 14:5) cannot claim any support for such convictions from the Old Testament. Nowhere does the Mosaic law prescribe strict vegetarianism, and a preference for fasting days.

Similarly, the "strong man" who "believes he may eat anything" (Rom 14:2) and who "esteems all days alike" is not asserting his freedom from the Mosaic law but from pagan superstitious beliefs about the astral influence on the days of the week. The predominant Gentile composition of the Roman congregation (Rom 13:11), apparently favored these pagan superstitions.

It is unfortunate that Pastor Taylor ignores that the whole discussion is not about freedom to observe the Mosaic law versus freedom from its observance, but about concerns over "unessential" scruples of conscience dictated by pagan and sectarian superstitions. Since these differing convictions and practices did not undermine the essence of the Gospel, Paul advises mutual tolerance and respect in this matter.

That the Mosaic law is not at stake in Romans 14 is also indicated by the term "*koinos*—common" which is used in verse 14 to designate "unclean" food. This term is radically different from the word "*akathartos*—impure, unclean" used in Leviticus 11 (Septuagint) to designate unlawful foods. This suggests that the dispute was not over meat which was unlawful according to the Mosaic Law, but about meat which per se was lawful to eat but because of its association with idol worship (cf. 1 Cor 8:1-13) was regarded by some as "*koinos*—common," that is, to be avoided by Christians.

### Superstitions Over Astral Influences on Weekdays

It might be helpful to point out that the letter to the Romans was written to a predominantly Gentile community. Paul himself says: "I am speaking to you Gentiles" (Rom 11:13). The Gentiles had developed numerous superstitions regarding astral influence on the days of the week. This development occurred just before the beginning of Christianity, when the Romans adopted from the Jews the seven-day week we use today. Prior to that time the Romans had used an eight-day week, known as *numdinum*. This question is discussed at great length in chapter 8 of my dissertation *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*.

When the Romans adopted the seven-day week, they decided to name each day of the week after the planet-god which allegedly controlled the day (Sunday for the Sun-god, Monday for the Moon-god, etc.). The Jewish custom was to designate the days of the week by number (that is, first day, second day, etc.). Only the sixth and seventh day had a name, namely, "Preparation" and "Sabbath."

The popular belief that each day of the week was controlled by a planet-god, led to the development various practices. People preferred certain days for religious or business practices, abstained from certain foods on certain days and even wore finger rings set with the stone favored by the planet-god controlling the day.

In researching for my book *CHRISTIAN DRESS AND ADORNMENT* I was surprised to discover how many superstitions existed in ancient Rome about the days of the week. For example, wealthy people wore a different ring each day in accordance to the stone preference of the planet-god controlling that day. Apollonius of Tyana, a Pythagorean philosopher of the first century, offers the following list of finger rings set with

different precious stones, to be worn on the proper planetary day of the week to ensure the favor of celestial influences:

Day	Gem of the Day	Talismanic Gem	Astral Control
Sunday	Diamond	Pearl	Sun
Monday	Pearl	Emerald	Moon
Tuesday	Ruby	Topaz	Mars
Wednesday	Amethyst	Turquoise	Mercury
Thursday	Cornelian	Sapphire	Jupiter
Friday	Emerald	Ruby	Venus
Saturday	Turquoise	Tourmaline	Saturn <sup>12</sup>

Christians were influenced by the pagan superstitions about the days of the week, as indicated by the frequent condemnation of these by church leaders. For references and a discussion of this problem, see *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY* pp. 252-253. There were also sectarian movements which promoted ascetic practices on certain days of the week to court divine help. It is within this context of pagan and sectarian superstitions about the days of the week, that Paul's statement about the preference given by some to certain days of the week must be understood. After all he was writing to a community composed predominantly by Gentile Christians (Rom 13:11) who were influenced by societal practices.

A second point to note is that Paul applies the basic principle "observe it in honor of the Lord" (Rom 14:6) *only* to the case of the person "who observes the day." He never says the opposite, namely, "the man who esteems all days alike, esteems them in honor of the Lord." In other words, with regard to diet, Paul teaches that one can honor the Lord both by eating and by abstaining (Rom 14:6); but with regard to days, he does not even concede that the person who regards all the days alike does so to the Lord. Thus, Paul hardly gives his endorsement to those who esteemed all days alike.

Finally, if as generally presumed, it was the "weak" believer who observed the Sabbath, Paul would classify himself with the "weak" since he observed the Sabbath and other Jewish feasts (Acts 18:4, 19; 17:1, 10, 17; 20:16). Paul, however, views himself as "strong" ("we who are strong"—Rom 15:1); thus, he could not have been thinking of Sabbathkeeping when he speaks of the preference over days.

Support for this conclusion is also provided by Paul's advice: "Let every one be fully convinced in his own mind" (Rom 14:5). It is difficult to see how Paul could reduce the observance of the Sabbath, to a matter of personal conviction without ever explaining the reason for it. This is especially surprising since he labors at great length to explain why circumcision was not binding upon the Gentiles.

### **No Controversy Over the Sabbath**

If Paul taught his Gentile converts to regard Sabbathkeeping as a personal matter, Jewish-Christians readily would have attacked his temerity for setting aside the Sabbath law, as they did regarding circumcision (Acts 21:21). The fact that there is no hint of any such controversy in the New Testament indicates that Paul never discouraged Sabbathkeeping or encouraged Sundaykeeping instead.

The preference over days in Romans presumably had to do with fast days rather than feast days, since the context deals with abstinence from meat and wine (Rom 14:2, 6, 21). Support for this view is provided by an early Christian document, called *Didache* (ch. 8, dated about A. D. 100) which enjoins Christians to fast on Wednesday and Friday rather than on Monday and Thursday like the Jews.

Paul refuses to deliberate on private matters such as fasting on certain days of the week, because he recognizes that spiritual exercises can be performed in different ways and at different times by different people. The important thing for Paul is to "pursue what makes for peace and for mutual upbuilding" (Rom 14:19).

If the conflict in the Roman Church had been over the observance of holy days, the problem would have been even more manifest than the one over diet. After all, eating habits are a private matter, but Sabbathkeeping is a public, religious exercise of the whole community. Any disagreement on the latter would have been not only noticeable but also inflammatory.

The fact that Paul devotes 21 verses to the discussion of food and less than two verses (Rom 14:5-6) to that of days, suggests that the latter was a very limited problem for the Roman Church, presumably because it had to do with private conviction on the merit or demerit of doing certain spiritual exercises such as fasting on some specific days. A modern day equivalent would be the private conviction of some Christians who wish to remember Christ's birth on December 25—the pagan date for the celebration of the birthday of the Sun-god. As long as the honoring of Christ's birth on December 25 is a private matter, and not made an official Holy Day that every church members is expected to observe, Paul would recommend tolerance on this matter.

In the Roman world, as noted earlier, there were superstitious beliefs about certain days being more favorable than others for undertaking specific projects. To court the help of supernatural power, people adopted various superstitious practices. Church leaders frequently rebuked Christians for adopting such a superstitious mentality. Possibly, Paul alludes to this kind of problem, which at his time was still too small to deserve much attention. Since these practices did not undermine the essence of the Gospel, Paul advises mutual tolerance and respect on this matter.

In the light of the above considerations, we conclude that Pastor Taylor's claim that in Romans 14:5 "Paul makes the Sabbath a non-issue for New Testament Christians," is without textual and contextual support. He is reading into the passage his own gratuitous assumptions. The diet and days promoted by what Paul calls the "weak" believers, are foreign to the Mosaic Law. They were most likely influenced by pagan/secular superstitions about astral influence on certain days of the week—superstitions which Christians adapted to their own beliefs, as indicated by superstitious practices connected to Easter and Christmas. This process is well documented in the annals of church history.

#### **PASTOR TAYLOR'S INTERPRETATION OF HEBREWS 4**

Hebrews 4:3-10 is the next passage used by Pastor Taylor to support his view that for New Testament Christians the Sabbath is a spiritual, daily experience of rest in Christ and not a literal observance of the seventh day. He believes that "the author of Hebrews is saying that those who believe in Jesus are resting in a Sabbath-like rest. The time to enter that rest is another day called TODAY! Five times in the passage 'Today' is repeated. The Sabbath-like rest that is offered to us in Christ is a 'Today' experience; today and every day as we trust in Christ's righteousness and rest from any trust in our own works. Here again the New Testament indicates that the Sabbath is a FULFILLED institution. Here we see that Jesus is our Sabbath-like rest. When we trust Him by faith, we are experiencing Sabbath-like rest each and every day of our lives! What a beautiful concept! Jesus is your Sabbath and mine when we trust daily in Him. My eyes were starting to see another perspective I had never seen before."

Pastor Taylor continues arguing that "There are some who have tried to make this text a reason for continued Sabbath keeping, but that ignores the context of the passage. It also ignores the greater context of the book of Hebrews. The entire book is dedicated to showing the superiority of Christ to all of the Old Testament system. . . . In chapters 8-10 He is a greater sanctuary/temple, a greater sacrifice, a greater covenant. The entire book of Hebrews is about Jesus being better than, and the fulfillment of, the entire Old Testament/covenant system. To try to say, in the middle of this theme, that Sabbath is a binding day for Christians is to miss not only the context of Chapters 3-4, but the larger context of the book. The logical point that the author is making is that JESUS IS A BETTER SABBATH than the old literal one-day-a-week rest, but HE IS OUR REST

TODAY AND EVERY DAY AS WE TRUST IN HIM! He is the true temple, the true Passover, the true law, the TRUE SABBATH! As I started to study all of this out, my heart would just burn within me as I saw the significance of Jesus in this book.”

It is unfortunate that Pastor Taylor violates again some fundamental rules of Biblical interpretations by ignoring important textual and contextual indicators of the passage under consideration. His claim that Hebrews 4 teaches that “Sabbath is a FULFILLED institution” that believers experience every day by believing in Christ, grossly misinterprets what the author teaches about the Sabbath.

### **Three Meanings of the Sabbath Rest**

Had Pastor Taylor taken time to read carefully Hebrews 3 and 4, he would have noticed that the author presents three different levels of meanings of the Sabbath rest by welding two texts together, Psalms 95:11 and Genesis 2:2 . At the first level, the Sabbath rest points to God’s creation rest, when “his works were finished from the foundation of the world . . . and God rested on the seventh day from all his works” (Heb 4:3,4). This is the original *physical* aspect of the Sabbath rest as cessation from work on the seventh day (Ex 20:10; 23:12; 31:14; 34:21) in order to commemorate the completion and perfection of God’s creation.

At the second level, the physical rest experience of the Sabbath in Hebrews symbolizes the promise of entry into the land of Canaan—an experience which was denied to the wilderness generation (“failed to enter” Heb 4:6; cf. 3:16-19), but which was realized later when the Israelites under Joshua did enter the land of rest (Heb 4:8).

To understand the application of the weekly *physical* Sabbath rest to the *political* or *national* aspiration of a Land of Rest, it is important to note that in OT times the Sabbath rest served to epitomize the national aspirations for a peaceful life in a land at rest (Deut 12:9; 25:19; Is 14:3) where the king would give to the people “rest from all enemies” (2 Sam 7:1; cf. 1 Kings 8:5), and where God would find His “resting place” among His people and especially in His sanctuary at Zion (2 Chron 6:41; 1 Chron 23:25; Ps 132:8, 13, 14; Is 66:1). Scholars, like Gerhard von Rad, have traced the “Sabbath rest” motif in the Old Testament, and have shown how the weekly *physical rest* experience, came to symbolize for the Jews the hope for a *national rest* when they would enjoy “rest from all enemies.”

At the third and most important level, the Sabbath rest in Hebrews 4 prefigures the redemption rest which has dawned for God’s people through Christ’s coming. The author establishes the redemptive meaning of the Sabbath rest by drawing a remarkable conclusion from Psalm 95:7, 11 which he quotes several times (Heb 4:3, 5, 7). In Psalm 95, God invites the Israelites to enter into His rest which was denied to the rebellious wilderness generation (Heb 4:7-11). The fact that God should renewed “again” the promise of His rest long after the actual entrance into the earthly Canaan—namely, at the time of David by saying “today” (Heb 4:7)—is interpreted by the author of Hebrews to mean two things: First, God’s Sabbath rest was not exhausted when the Israelites under Joshua found a resting place in the land, but that it still “remains for the people of God” (4:9); Second, the ultimate fulfillment of the Sabbath rest has dawned with the coming of Christ (Heb 4:3, 7).

### **The Sabbath Rest as a Faith Response**

Pastor Taylor is correct in noting that the phrase “Today, when you hear his voice” (Heb 4:7) has a clear reference to Christ. The readers had heard God’s voice in the “last days” (Heb 1:2) as it spoke through Christ and had received the promise of the Sabbath rest. The problem with Pastor Taylor is his failure to recognize that Christ’s coming fulfills the Sabbath rest, not by replacing the *physical rest* experience of the seventh day with a daily *spiritual rest* experience, but by enabling the believer to experience the spiritual redemption rest through the physical rest of the seventh day.

It is through the *physical rest* that we apprehend and experience *the spiritual rest*. This is also true for the Lord's Supper and Baptism. It is through the immersion into the *physical* water, that the believers conceptualize their death to a sinful life and their resurrection to a new life in Christ. This is why we do not spiritualize baptism by dry cleaning people into the church. By the same token, the *physical* rest of the Sabbath remains, but in the light of the Christ event, ceasing from one's labor on the Sabbath (Heb 4:10) signifies both a present experience of redemption (Heb 4:3) and a hope of future fellowship with God (Heb 4:11).

The "Sabbath rest" that is still outstanding for God's people (Heb 4:9) has both a physical and spiritual dimension. Hebrews gives a deeper meaning to the literal observance of the Sabbath—namely, a faith response to God. This is the deeper meaning of the Sabbath rest that the "Hebrew/Jewish" minded readers needed to understand. Support for a literal understanding of Sabbathkeeping is provided by two indicators. The first, is the historical usage of the term "*sabbatismos*—sabbathkeeping" used in verse 9 and the second, the description of Sabbathkeeping as cessation from work given in verse 10: "For whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his."

### Literal or Spiritual Sabbathkeeping?

The term *sabbatismos* is used in both pagan and Christian literature to denote, not a spiritual "a Sabbath-like rest" as claimed by Pastor Taylor, but the literal observance of the Sabbath. This fact is acknowledged even by Prof. Andrew T. Lincoln in the scholarly symposium *FROM SABBATH TO THE LORD'S DAY*, produced by seven British/American Sundaykeeping scholars. It is surprising that Pastor Taylor cites this symposium in his "Open Letter," but he ignores the following statement by Prof. Lincoln: "The use of *sabbatismos* elsewhere in extant Greek literature gives an indication of its more exact shade of meaning. It is used in Plutarch, *De Superstitione* 3 (*Moralia* 166A) of Sabbath observance. There are also four occurrences in post canonical literature that are independent of Hebrews 4:9. They are Justin, *Dialogue with Trypho* 23:3; Epiphanius, *Adversus Haereses* 30:2:2; *Martyrium Petri et Pauli* 1; *Apostolic Constitutions* 2:36:2. In each of these places the term denotes the observance or celebration of the Sabbath. This usage corresponds to the Septuagint usage of the cognate verb *sabbatizo* (cf. Ex 16:30; Lev 23:32; 26:34f.; 2 Chron 36:21). Thus the writer to the Hebrews is saying that since the time of Joshua an observance of the Sabbath rest has been outstanding" (p. 213).

In spite of his candid admission that *sabbatismos* denotes the literal observance of the Sabbath, Prof. Lincoln argues that New Covenant Christians "discharge their duty of Sabbath observance" by entering by faith into God's rest. He adds: "This is analogous to God's ceasing from His works at the creation (cf. also Heb 4:4)." This conclusion can hardly be drawn from the analogy of God's rest. The text reads: "For whoever enters God's rest also ceases from his labors as God did from his" (Heb 4:10). The point of the analogy is simply that as God ceased on the seventh day from His creation work, so believers are to cease on the same day from their labors. This is a simple statement of the nature of Sabbathkeeping which essentially involves the *physical* cessation from work on the seventh day, and not the *spiritual* experience of the redemption rest every day. The probative value of this text is enhanced by the fact that the writer is not arguing for the permanence of Sabbathkeeping—he simply takes it for granted.

The concern of the writer to the Hebrews, however, is not merely to encourage his readers to interrupt their secular activities on the Sabbath, but rather to help them understand the deeper significance of the act of resting for God on the Sabbath. The recipients of the book are designated as "Hebrews" presumably because of their tendency to adopt Jewish liturgical customs as a means to gain access to God. This is indicated by the appeals in chapters 7 to 10 to discontinue any participation in the Temple's sacrificial services. Thus, these Hebrew-minded Christians did not need to be reminded of the physical-cessation aspect of Sabbathkeeping. This aspect yields only a

negative idea of rest, one which only would have served to encourage existing Judaizing tendencies. What they needed to know, instead, was the deeper meaning of the act of resting on the Sabbath, especially in the light of the coming of Christ.

### **The Deeper Meaning of the Sabbath Rest**

This deeper meaning can be seen in the antithesis the author makes between those who failed to enter into God's rest because of "unbelief—*apeitheias*" (Heb 4:6, 11), that is, faithlessness which results in disobedience, and those who enter it by "faith—*piste*" (Heb 4:2, 3), that is, faithfulness that results in obedience.

The act of resting on the Sabbath for the author of Hebrews is not merely physical relaxation, but rather a faith response to God. Such a response entails not the hardening of one's heart (Heb 4:7) but being receptive to "hear his voice" (Heb 4:7). It means experiencing God's salvation rest, not by works but by faith—not by doing but by being saved through faith (Heb 4:2, 3, 11). On the Sabbath, as John Calvin aptly puts it in his commentary on Hebrews 4:10, believers are "to cease from their work to allow God to work in them."

This expanded interpretation of Sabbathkeeping in the light of the Christ event was designed, not to terminate the literal observance of the Sabbath as Pastor Taylor maintains, but to help believers understand the deeper meaning of the act of resting on the seventh day, namely a faith response, a yes "today" response to God. Karl Barth eloquently explains that the act of resting on the Sabbath is an act of resignation to our human efforts to achieve salvation in order "to allow the omnipotent grace of God to have the first and last word at every point." The fact that Hebrews 4 reflects the Gospel understanding of Sabbathkeeping as a time to experience the blessings of salvation, shows that the Apostolic church understood the Sabbath, not as "FULFILLED" by Christ, but as ENHANCED by Christ's redemptive accomplishments.

### **PASTOR TAYLOR'S INTERPRETATION OF ACTS 15**

The next major passage marshaled by Pastor Taylor to defend his termination view of the Sabbath, is Acts 15, which describes the first Apostolic council convened in Jerusalem at about A. D. 49 to deliberate on the basic requirements to be fulfilled by Gentiles who accepted the Christian faith. The Council was occasioned by the dissension which arose in Antioch when certain agitators came to the Church there from Judea, teaching: "unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved: (Acts 15:1). To settle the dispute it was found necessary for Paul and Barnabas to go to Jerusalem to discuss the problem with the "apostles and elders" (Acts 15 :3).

At the meeting there was "much debate" (Acts 15 :7) and discourses were made by Peter, Paul and Barnabas (vv. 7, 12). At the end James, who appears to have acted as the presiding officer, proposed that Gentiles who became Christians were to be exempted from circumcision, but they were to be notified "to abstain from the pollutions of idols and unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood. For from early generations Moses has had in every city those who preach him, for he is read every Sabbath in the synagogues" (vv. 20-21).

Pastor Taylor's interpretation of the decision of the Jerusalem Council is incredible. He argues that the Gentiles were exempted not only from the circumcision, but also from Sabbath observance, because the two institutions were closely linked together. Circumcision was the entrance to the Jewish community and the Sabbath "was the continuing sign of allegiance to the Old Covenant." Thus, by exempting the Gentiles from circumcision, the Jerusalem Council allegedly exempted them also from the Mosaic law in general and the Sabbath in particular. Pastor Taylor writes: "Where there was no entrance to the Jewish community through circumcision, there was no Sabbath requirement. The entrance sign came first. The continuing sign was immaterial if the initial sign was not present."

Pastor Taylor's argument that the exemption from circumcision granted to the Gentiles automatically exempted them also from the observance of the Sabbath, is based on his gratuitous assumption, namely, that the observance of the Sabbath was applicable only "to the stranger within their gates or their households. It was not applicable to the stranger who 'sojourned among them.'" This assumption is discredited by the Mosaic legislation in Leviticus 17-18 regarding the foreigners. This legislation which formed the basis of the four requirements of the Apostolic decree.

A careful reading of Leviticus 17-18 indicates that foreigners who dwelt among the Jews, were exempted from circumcision, but not from the Mosaic law in general. Leviticus 18:26 clearly states: "You shall keep my statutes and my ordinances and do none of these abominations, either the native or *the stranger* who sojourns among you." *The Sabbath was part of the commandments that foreigners were expected to observe.* In fact, Isaiah reassures "the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord, . . . every one who keeps the Sabbath," that they will be accepted and blessed by the Lord, "for my house shall be called a house of prayer for all people" (Is 56:16).

### **The Adoption of the Sabbath Rest in the Roman World**

Another important fact ignored by Pastor Taylor is that the Gentiles the Jerusalem Council had in mind were mostly, if not all, Sabbathkeeping God-fearers who had been instructed in the Jewish faith (Acts 10:2; 11:19-20; 13:43, 44; 14:1). They did not need to be taught about the Sabbath commandment. The custom of Sabbathkeeping was common not only among God-fearers (Jewish sympathizers) but also among Gentiles in general.

In a well-known passage, Philo writes: "There is not a single people to which the custom of Sabbath observance has not spread." (*Against Apion* 2,39). Tertullian, an influential church leader (about A. D. 200) reproaches the pagans for having adopted the Jewish custom of resting on the Sabbath. He writes: "You have selected one day [Saturday] in preference to other days as the day on which you do not take a bath or you postpone it until the evening, and on which you devote yourselves to leisure and abstain from revelry. In so doing you are turning from your own religion to a foreign religion, for the Sabbath and *cena pura* [special supper] are Jewish ceremonial observances" (*Ad Nationes* 1:13).

The Jewish Sabbath became so popular among the Romans that eventually it influenced them to adopt the seven-day week instead of their own eight-day week (*nundinum*). When this adoption took place just before the Christian era, the Romans made Saturday the first and most important day of the week for resting and banqueting. This development is discussed in chapter 8 of my dissertation *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*. In the light of the popularity of the Sabbath among both the Jews and the Gentiles, the Jerusalem Council could hardly have exempted the Gentiles from Sabbath observance without stirring a major controversy.

A fact often ignored, even by scholars, is that Saturday—*Dies Saturni* was widely accepted among the Romans as the day of rest. This helps us to understand why Sabbathkeeping never became an issue among Gentile Christians. If Saturday had been a working day in the Roman society, Sabbathkeeping would have been a problem for both Jewish and Gentile Christians. But there are no indications of such a problem in the New Testament or in the early Christian literature. The reason is that the Jews influenced the Romans to accept their Sabbath—known to the Romans as *Dies Saturni*/Saturday—as the weekly day of rest. Eventually Saturday was replaced by Sun-day, when the Sun-god became the most important god of the Roman Pantheon. This process began in the early part of the second century and culminated in A. D. 321 when Constantine made Sunday a civil holiday.

## **The Gentiles Were not Exempted from the Mosaic Law**

A careful look at the decree of the council hardly suggests a law-free salvation for the Gentiles, as claimed by Pastor Taylor. In his book *Luke and the People of God* Jacob Jervell perceptively points out: "The apostolic decree enjoins Gentiles to keep the law, and they keep that part of the law required for them to live together with Jews. It is not lawful to impose upon Gentiles more than Moses himself demanded. It is false to speak of the Gentiles as free from the law. The church, on the contrary, delivers the law to the Gentiles as Gentiles. Thus Luke succeeds in showing complete adherence to the law as well as the salvation of Gentiles as Gentiles" (p.144).

Pastor Taylor ignores the issue addressed at the Jerusalem Council was not the Mosaic law in general, but the circumcision in particular (15:1, 5, 9). The reason circumcision became such a serious issue in the evangelization of the Gentiles is simply because it entailed undergoing a surgical operation without anesthesia. This was undoubtedly a most painful experience for adult male persons which would have discouraged the acceptance of the Gospel.

By exempting the Gentiles from the painful surgical operation of circumcision, the Jerusalem council did not granted indiscriminate freedom from the law. This is clearly indicated by the four precepts of the decree: abstention "from pollution of idols and from unchastity and from what is strangled and from blood" (Acts 15: 20). Studies have shown that the four precepts of the apostolic decree are drawn from Leviticus 17 and 18. In the light of this fact "*porneia*," translated "unchastity," actually refers to unlawful marriages to close relatives discussed at length in Leviticus 18:6-18. This excessive concern of James and of the Apostles (Acts 15 :22) to respect the Mosaic laws regarding food, unlawful marriages, and association with the Gentiles, hardly allows us to imagine that a weightier matter such as Sabbath observance had been unanimously abrogated.

## **PASTOR TAYLOR INTERPRETATION OF CHRIST AND THE SABBATH**

Pastor Taylor attempts to prove that Christ fulfilled the Sabbath by becoming our Sabbath rest. Simply stated, he believes that the Sabbath was a ceremonial law which pointed to Christ's redemptive mission. Jesus fulfilled the Sabbath by becoming "the REST PROVIDER and the LORD OF THE SABBATH." New Testament Christians observe the Sabbath, not by resting physically on the seventh day, but by experiencing the rest of salvation every day.

Commenting on Christ inaugural address delivered in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:16-21), Pastor Taylor writes: "Jesus not only claimed to be the Messiah in this statement, but He called himself the JUBILEE! Jesus called himself the ULTIMATE SABBATH! He was claiming to be the Messiah and the Sabbath personified. The people knew exactly what He was claiming! They tried to kill Him for it. Can Jesus be any more clear about who He is? The Sabbath is a Person!"

Does Luke 4:16-21 teach us that Christ terminated the observance of the Sabbath by fulfilling the Messianic typologies of the sabbatical and jubilee years? A careful reading of this passage in the light the Sabbath healings and teachings of Jesus reveals otherwise. Let us briefly examine a few passages.

Luke introduces Christ as a habitual Sabbathkeeper ("as his custom was"—4:16) who delivered His inaugural Nazareth address on a Sabbath day, by reading and commenting upon a passage drawn mostly from Isaiah 61:1-3 (also 58:6) which says: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18).

In this passage Isaiah describes, by means of the imagery of the Sabbath years, the liberation the Messiah would bring to His people. Christ used this passage to present Himself to the people as the very fulfillment of their Messianic expectations nourished by the vision of the Sabbath years. The latter is clearly indicated by Jesus' brief exposition of the passage: "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing" (4:21).

### **Christ Fulfillment of the Messianic Typologies of the Sabbath**

Pastor Taylor is correct in pointing out that the theme of *promise* and *fulfillment* is recurrent in all the Gospels, including Luke. The risen Christ, according to Luke, explained to His disciples that His teaching and mission represented the *fulfillment* of "everything written about me in the law of Moses and the prophets and the psalms" (Luke 24:44; cf. 24:26-27). The question is, How does the Sabbath fit into this theme of promise and fulfillment? Did Christ fulfill the Messianic typology of the Sabbath by *terminating* its function, as Pastor Taylor claims, or by *actualizing* and enriching its meaning? The answer is abundantly clear when we study Christ's Sabbath pronouncements made in the context of seven Sabbath healing episodes reported in the Gospels. For the sake of brevity we will look only at the healing of the crippled woman reported in Luke 13:10-17.

In the brief narrative (Luke 13:10-17) the verb "to free—*luein*" is used by the Lord *three* times, thus suggesting *intentional* rather than *accidental* usage of the term. The verb is first used by Christ in addressing the woman, "you are *freed* from your infirmity" (13:12). Twice again the verb is used by Christ to respond to the indignation of the ruler of the synagogue: "You hypocrites! Does not each of you on the Sabbath *untie* his ox or his ass from the manger and lead it away to water it? And ought not this woman, a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years, be *loosed* from this bond on the Sabbath day?" (13:15-16).

Arguing from a minor to a major case, Christ shows how the Sabbath had been paradoxically distorted. An ox or an ass could be legitimately *untied* on the Sabbath for drinking purposes (possibly because a day without water would result in loss of weight and consequently in less market value), but a suffering woman could not be released on such a day from the shackles of her physical and spiritual infirmities.

Christ acted deliberately against prevailing misconceptions, not to terminate the Sabbath, but to restore the day to God's intended purpose. It should be noticed that in this as well as in all other instances, Christ is not questioning the binding obligations of the Sabbath commandment, but rather He argues for its true values which had been largely obscured by the accumulation of traditions and countless regulations.

The imagery of loosing on the Sabbath a victim bound by Satan's bonds (Luke 13:16) recalls Christ's announcement of His mission "to proclaim *release* to the captives . . . to set as *liberty* those who are oppressed" (Luke 4:18). Jesus' act of freeing a daughter of Abraham from physical and spiritual bonds on the Sabbath, exemplify how the liberation of the Messianic Sabbath was being fulfilled (Luke 4:21).

Acts of healing such as that of the Crippled Woman, are not merely acts of love and compassion but true "sabbatical acts" which reveal how the Messianic redemption typified and promised by the Sabbath was being fulfilled through Christ's saving ministry.

How did the woman and the people who witnessed Christ's saving intervention come to view the Sabbath? Did they come to view the Sabbath as a ceremonial law which was being fulfilled by Christ? Hardly so. Luke reports that while Christ's "adversaries were put to shame . . . the people rejoiced" (13:17), and the woman "praised God" (13:13). Undoubtedly, for the healed woman and for all the people blessed by Christ's Sabbath ministry, the day became the memorial of the healing of their bodies and souls, the exodus from the bonds of Satan into the freedom of the Savior.

The new and richer meaning of the Sabbath can be seen in the various Sabbath pericopes reported in the Gospels. It is unfortunate that Pastor Taylor ignores what Jesus said about the Sabbath. It would have been wiser for him to begin his investigation with what Jesus has to say about the Sabbath, rather than with three problematic Pauline passages. Had he done so, he would have been surprised to discover that the Gospels give more coverage to the Sabbath ministry of Jesus, than to any other aspect of His ministry. Why? Because the Sabbath was important for NT Christians. They wanted to know how Jesus kept the Sabbath, so that they could follow His example.

### **Is the Sabbath Commandment Missing in the New Testament?**

Had Pastor Taylor studied the Sabbath teachings of Jesus, he would not have written the following statement: "I was blown away to discover that all of the other nine commandments are restated as important for Christians in relationship with Christ, except one, the Sabbath. The Sabbath is NEVER TAUGHT as a moral ought for Christians. Not once! Instead it is reinterpreted as a daily rest in Jesus as we have seen before."

To claim that "the Sabbath is NEVER TAUGHT as a moral ought for Christians," is utterly discredited by all what Jesus said about the Sabbath. The truth of the matter is that Jesus spent more time clarifying the Sabbath commandment, than any other commandment. The reason is to be found in the fact that the Sabbath affects our relationship with God, more than any other commandment. This is why it is the longest commandment placed in the center of the Decalogue. Let us look at some of Christ's statements.

### **The Sabbath was Made for Mankind**

A fundamental statement of Jesus about the Sabbath is found in Mark 2:27, where the Savior refutes the charge of Sabbathbreaking leveled against His disciples who were relieving their hunger by plucking raw ears of grain, by saying: "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath" (Mark 2:27).

Pastor Taylor contends that in this text "Jesus is not making a universal statement here. He is basically saying that the Sabbath was made for the man, not the other way around. The context clearly teaches that Sabbath is not in the category of moral oughts. It is lumped in with the temporary or ceremonial system. This truth, right from the heart of Jesus Sabbath teachings, truly opened up to me a new paradigm."

Does the fact that the Sabbath was made by God for man's benefit, excludes it from "the category of moral oughts"? Are not all the moral principles of the Decalogue established for our benefit?

Our Lord's choice of words is significant. The verb "made—*ginomai*" alludes to the original "making" of the Sabbath and the word "man—*anthropos*" suggests its human function. Thus to establish the human and universal value of the Sabbath, Christ reverts to its very origin, right after the creation of man. Why? Because for the Lord the law of the beginning stands supreme.

The importance of God's original design is emphasized in another instance when in reproving the corruption of the institution of marriage, which occurred under the Mosaic code, Christ reverted to its Edenic origin, saying: "From the beginning it was not so" (Matt 19:8). Christ then traces both marriage and the Sabbath to their creation origin in order to clarify their fundamental value and function for mankind.

Christ affirmed that the Sabbath came into being (*egeneto*) after the creation of man, not to make him a slave of rules and regulations but to ensure his physical and spiritual well-being. The welfare of man is *not restricted* but *guaranteed* by the proper observance of the Sabbath. By this memorable affirmation then, Christ does not "lumped it [the Sabbath] with the temporary or ceremonial system," but establishes its permanent

validity by appealing to its original creation when God determined its intended function for the well-being of mankind.

## **New Testament Observance of the Sabbath**

Pastor Taylor ignores that Christ's statements about Sabbathkeeping reflect, not the termination of the Sabbath, but the existence of an ongoing controversy between the Christian congregations and the Jewish synagogues, which in some cases may have been located across the street from one another. The controversy centered primarily on the manner of Sabbathkeeping. Was the day to be observed primarily as "sacrifice," that is, as an outward fulfillment of the ceremonial laws about the Sabbath? Or was the Sabbath to be observed as "mercy," that is, as an inward expression of the moral intent of the Sabbath to show compassion and do good to those in need (Matt 12:7)?

To defend the Christian understanding of Sabbathkeeping as a day to celebrate Messianic redemption by showing "mercy" and doing "good" to those in need, the Gospel writers appeal to the example and teaching of Jesus. For example, in the healing of the crippled woman, Luke contrasts two different concepts of Sabbathkeeping: that of the Ruler of the synagogue versus that of Christ. For the Ruler, the Sabbath consisted of rules to obey rather than people to love (Luke 13:14). For Christ, the Sabbath was a day to bring physical and spiritual liberation to needy people (Luke 13:12, 16).

Christ challenged the Ruler's misconception by appealing to the accepted customs of watering animals on the Sabbath. If the daily needs of animals could be met on the Sabbath, how much more the needs of "a daughter of Abraham whom Satan bound for eighteen years"! Shouldn't she "be loosed from this bond on the sabbath day?" (Luke 13:16).

This humanitarian understanding of the Sabbath is expressed also in the episode of the healing of the man with the withered hand, reported by all the three Synoptics (Mark 3:1-6; Matt 12:9-14; Luke 6:6-11). In this instance, Jesus responds to the testing question posed by a deputation of Scribes and Pharisees, regarding the legitimacy of healing on the Sabbath by asking a question of principle: "Is it lawful on the sabbath, to do good or to do harm, to save life or to kill" (Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9)?

It is noteworthy that in both Mark and Luke Christ substitutes for the verb "to heal" (*therapeuein*) used in the question, the verbs "to do good" (*agathopoiein*) and "to save" (*sozein*). The reason for this change is Christ's concern to include not one type but all kinds of benevolent activities within the moral intent of the Sabbath law. Such a broad interpretation of the function of the Sabbath finds no parallel in rabbinic concessions.

According to Matthew, Christ illustrated the principle of Sabbathkeeping as a time of benevolent service by adding a second question containing a concrete example: "What man of you, if he has one sheep and it falls into a pit on the sabbath, will not lay hold of it and lift it out? Of how much more *value* is a man than a sheep!" (Matt 12:11-12). Both by the question of principle and by its illustration, Christ reveals the *original value* of the Sabbath, as a day to honor God by showing concern and compassion for others.

Unfortunately, with the accumulation of restrictions (Mark 7:9), the observance of the day had been reduced to a legalistic religiosity rather than an opportunity to offer loving service to the Creator-Redeemer by serving needy fellow beings. The believer who on the Sabbath experiences the blessing of salvation will automatically be moved "to save" and not "to kill" others.

Christ's accusers, by failing to show concern for the physical and spiritual well-being of others on the Sabbath, revealed their defective understanding and experience of God's Holy Day. Rather than celebrating God's goodness on the Sabbath by being involved in a saving ministry, they engaged in destructive efforts, *looking for faults* and devising methods *to kill* Christ (Mark 3:2-6).

The new humanitarian value which Christ placed upon the Sabbath is expressed in Matthew with uncompromising positiveness: "So it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath" (Matt 12:12). Matthew's positive understanding of the Sabbath as a day "to do good" (Matt 12:12) and to show "mercy" rather than religiosity (Matt 12:7) is fully shared by the other three Gospels. In both Mark and Luke, Christ is cited as saying the same thing by means of a rhetorical question, precisely that on the Sabbath it is lawful "to do good" and "to save" (Mark 3:4; Luke 6:9).

In Luke, Christ is reported as saying that the Sabbath is the day to loose human beings from physical and spiritual bonds (Luke 13:12,16). In John, Christ invites His followers to share on the Sabbath in the divine redemptive activity (John 9:4; 5:17; 7:22-23). Had Pastor Taylor taken time to study Christ's Sabbath pronouncements, he would have discovered that the Gospels unanimously present the Sabbath as a time to serve God especially by rendering a loving service to human needs.

The new Christian understanding of the Sabbath as a time, not of passive idleness, but of active, loving service to needy souls, represents a radical departure from contemporary Jewish Sabbathkeeping. This is attested also in an early document, known as the *Epistle to Diognetus* (dates between A. D. 130-200), where the Jews are charged with "speaking falsely of God" because they claim that "He [God] forbade us to do what is good on the Sabbath-days—how is not this impious?" (4:3).

The positive humanitarian understanding of Sabbathkeeping is rooted in Christ's fulfillment of the redemptive typology of the Sabbath, which is presented in the Gospels in several ways. Viewing the rest and redemption typified by the Old Testament Sabbath as realized by Christ's redemptive mission, New Testament believers regarded Sabbathkeeping, not as a ceremonial practice abolished by Christ, but as a day to celebrate and experience the Messianic redemption-rest by showing "mercy" and doing "good" to those in need. What this means to us Christians today is that on and through the Sabbath we celebrate Christ's creative and redemptive accomplishments by acting redemptively toward others.

## **PASTOR TAYLOR INTERPRETATION OF THE CREATION SABBATH**

Pastor Taylor closes his Biblical journey by stating four basic reasons for rejecting the creation origin of the Sabbath. He wrote: "First, there is no evening and morning mentioned here [Gen 2:2-3]. All the other creation days had the evening and morning connected to them. Not that this was not a literal day, but there is a continuing aspect of this day that is implied. God intended that the rest He had established would have a continuing quality. It would have remained as a daily experience had it not been for the incursion of sin. Rest would have been a perpetual reality. Second, the word Sabbath is not mentioned. There is no mention of this being a Sabbath. Third, there was no need for Adam and Eve to rest yet because they had not worked. Finally, there is no record that anyone ever kept the Sabbath from that time until God taught the people about it through the manna episode and of course, Mount Sinai."

These four arguments are examined at great length in chapter 2 of my book *THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE*. Interested readers would do well to read this informative chapter. For the purpose of this response I will make a few basic observations.

### **Omission of the Formula "Evening and Morning"**

Pastor Taylor's first argument that the omission of the formula "and there was evening and morning," implies that the Sabbath was to be "a daily experience" in a perfect world, is negated by the fact that God blessed and sanctified the "seventh day," not every previous day. In other words, God promised at creation to make the seventh day a channel of blessings for His people. Why would God bless and sanctify the seventh day, if he wanted His people to enjoy the blessings of the Sabbath every day?

The omission of the formula “and there was evening and morning, a seventh day” in connection with the seventh day may be due to the fact that the seventh day is not followed by other creation days. The formula serves to separate each of the first six days of creation from the following ones. The seventh day, being the last day of creation, did not need to be separated because there was no “eighth day” to follow. By marking the termination of the creation week, the seventh day did not need to be defined in terms of its termination because there were no further creation days.

Pastor Taylor’s contention that rest “would have remained as a daily experience had it not been for the incursion of sin,” is negated by the fact that the pattern of six days of work and the seventh for rest were established before the Fall by the example of God Himself. God did not need six days to create our solar system. He could have spoken it into existence in a second, since His creation was accomplished by the spoken word (Ps 33:6). But He chose to establish a human week of seven days and to use it Himself in order to give a divine perspective to our six days of work and to our seventh day of rest. God’s willingness to enter into the limitations of human time at creation in order to enable us to identify with Him is a marvellous revelation of His willingness to enter into human flesh at the incarnation in order to become Emmanuel, God with us.

Pastor Taylor ignores that *the creation week is a human week*, established by God for regulating our human life. To negate the creation origin of the Sabbath means to negate the creation origin of the seven days week itself, since the two are inextricably connected. The seventh day Sabbath is the culmination and completion of the creation week. If the Sabbath is a Jewish institution terminated by Christ, then the same would be true of the seven days week. The very fact that most people today still regulate their lives in accordance with the seven days week established at creation, is a compelling proof that the Sabbath is part of the human structure of time established at creation.

### **The Absence of the Term “Sabbath”**

The absence of the term “Sabbath” in Genesis 2:2-3 is interpreted by Pastor Taylor as an indication that the Sabbath as an institution did not originate at creation but later at the time of Moses. This is a popular argument used by many to negate the creation origin of the Sabbath.

It is true that the name “Sabbath” does not occur in the passage, but the cognate verbal form *shabat* (to cease, to stop, to rest) is used. The latter, as noted by Ugo Cassuto in his *Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, “contains an allusion to the name ‘the Sabbath day’” (p.63). Moreover, as Cassuto sagaciously remarks, the use of the name *seventh day* rather than *Sabbath* may well reflect the writer’s concern to underline the *perpetual order* of the day, independent and free from any association with astrological “sabbaths” of the heathen nations (p. 68).

It is a known fact that the term *shabbatu*, which is strikingly similar to the Hebrew word for Sabbath (*shabbat*), occurs in the documents of ancient Mesopotamia. The term apparently designated the fifteenth day of the month, that is, the day of the full moon. By designating the day by number rather than by name, Genesis seems to emphasize that God’s Sabbath day is not like that of heathen nations, connected with the phases of the moon. Rather, it is the seventh day recurring in perpetual order, independent from any association with the cycles of heavenly bodies.

By pointing to a *perpetual order*, the seventh day strengthens the cosmological message of the creation story—precisely that God is both Creator and constant controller of this cosmos. In Exodus, however, where the seventh day is given in the context of the genesis/origin, not of this cosmos, but of the nation of Israel, the day is explicitly designated “Sabbath,” apparently to express its new historical and soteriological function.

## **Did Adam and Eve Need a Sabbath Rest?**

The third argument used by Pastor Taylor to negate the creation origin of the Sabbath is that “there was no need for Adam and Eve to rest yet because they had not worked.” This argument ignores the profound theological significance of the origin of human life with the Sabbath rest rather than with six days of work. The fact that Adam and Eve spent their first full day of life, not working, but resting in God’s presence, tells us that God created human beings, not to put them to work so that He could rest, but for them to enjoy sweet fellowship with Him.

In the Babylonian creation epic *Enuma elish* the god Marduk says: “Verily, savage-man I will create. He shall be charged with the service of the gods, that they might be at ease.” What a contrast with the Biblical creation story where God works six days to prepare a wonderful world for the first human couple to enjoy on the seventh day.

In the opening statement of his sermon “The Gift of Rest,” delivered nationwide on November 4, 2001 from the Coral Ridge Hour, Dr. James Kennedy said: “God so loved the human race that He gave us the Sabbath.” He continues highlighting the contrast between the human boss who urges his workers, saying: “Work, Lift, Push, Haul” and God who says: “Rest my son. Rest my daughter.” What a profound theological insight for Pastor Taylor to consider! The fact that God invited Adam and Eve to spend their first full day of life resting with Him on the Sabbath, is a marvelous revelation of God’s love.

It is unfortunate that Dr. Kennedy attempts to make a biblical/historical case for Sundaykeeping, after speaking so eloquently about the Sabbath. The next newsletter examines Dr. Kennedy’s sermon, dealing specifically with his attempts to legitimize Sunday observance as an Apostolic institution.

## **No Record of Sabbathkeeping in Genesis**

The fourth and perhaps the strongest argument used by Pastor Taylor against the creation origin of the Sabbath, is the absence of an explicit reference to Sabbathkeeping after Genesis 2 for the whole patriarchal period up to Exodus 16. He wrote: “there is no record that anyone ever kept the Sabbath from that time until God taught the people about it through the manna episode and of course, Mount Sinai.”

The absence of explicit references to Sabbathkeeping between Genesis 2 and Exodus 16 does not necessarily mean that the principle of Sabbathkeeping was unknown. It could simply mean that it is taken for granted. A number of reasons support this explanation.

First, we have a similar example of silence regarding the Sabbath between the books of Deuteronomy and 2 Kings. Such silence can hardly be interpreted as non-observance of the Sabbath since, when the first incidental reference occurs in 2 Kings 4:23, it describes the custom of visiting a prophet on the Sabbath.

Second, Genesis is not a book of laws like Exodus but is rather, a brief sketch of origins. Since no mention is made of any other commandment, silence regarding the Sabbath is not exceptional. The fact that God’s commandments were known is indicated by what the Lord says about Abraham: “Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws” (Gen 26:5).

Third, throughout the book of Genesis and the early chapters of Exodus one finds circumstantial evidences for the use of the seven-day week which would imply the existence of the Sabbath as well. The period of seven days is mentioned four times in the account of the Flood (Gen 7:4, 10; 8:10,12).

Apparently, the “week” also is used in a technical way to describe the duration of the nuptial festivities of Jacob (Gen 29:27) as well as the duration of mourning at his death (Gen 50:10). A similar period was observed by the friends of Job to express their

condolences to the patriarch (Job 2:13). Probably all the mentioned ceremonials were terminated by the arrival of the Sabbath.

Lastly, the Sabbath is presented in Exodus 16 and 20 as an already existing institution. Pastor Taylor maintains that “God explains the Sabbath concept to the people of Israel through the manna episode . . . [because] the people were unaware of any Sabbath up to this time.” This conclusion can hardly be drawn from instructions regarding the gathering of the manna, which presuppose a knowledge of the significance of the Sabbath: “On the sixth day, when they prepare what they bring in, it will be twice as much as they gather daily” (Ex 16:5). The omission of any explanation for gathering a double portion on the sixth day would be inexplicable if the Israelites had no previous knowledge of the Sabbath.

Similarly, in Exodus 20, the Sabbath is presupposed as something already familiar. The commandment does not say “Know the Sabbath day” but “Remember the Sabbath day” (Ex 20:8), thus implying that it was already known. Furthermore, the commandment presents the Sabbath as rooted in creation (Ex 20:11). This hardly allows for a late Exodus introduction of the festival.

The foregoing considerations discredit Pastor Taylor’s attempt to negate the creation origin of the Sabbath. On each of the first six days of creation God did something that had *lasting results* for the human family. The same is true for the seventh day. By resting, blessing, and sanctifying the seventh day, God created a day that would delineate the on-going weekly cycle for human beings, and invites them to fellowship with Him in a special way on the Sabbath day. God created the natural world by speaking, then man by moulding him out of dust and vivifying him with His life-giving Spirit, and the Sabbath by “sabbatizing” Himself.

By instituting the Sabbath at creation along with the basic components of human life such as marriage and labor, long before Israel existed, God made the day a permanent institution for the human family (Mark 2:27). The fact that later the Sabbath became one of the Ten Commandments does not negate its universality, but rather supports it, since the other nine commandments are universal principles binding upon the whole human family, not Israel alone.

Let us pray that the Lord may use this response to lead Pastor Taylor and other former Adventist pastors who like him have recently rejected the Sabbath, to reexamine their decisions and rediscover the Sabbath as the day of joyful celebration of God’s creative and redemptive work—the day when we stop our work to allow Christ to work in us more fully and freely; the day when we experience in a special way the presence, peace, and rest of Christ in our lives.

### **Contact Information**

Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.  
Retired Professor of Theology and Church History  
Andrews University  
4990 Appian Way, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Phone (616) 471-2915 Fax (616) 471-4013  
E-mail: [sbacchiocchi@qtm.net](mailto:sbacchiocchi@qtm.net) or [sbacchiocchi@csi.com](mailto:sbacchiocchi@csi.com)  
Web site: <http://www.biblicalperspectives.com>