

The Reply from Dr. James Kennedy and Two Recent Developments

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Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.
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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

This newsletter differs from the previous ones, because it addresses several issues, rather than a single topic. In Italian I would call it "a minestrone," that is, a soup with a mixture of ingredients. I hope that you love minestrone as much as I do. What caused me to change the format, is two developments. The first is the reply that I received from Dr. James Kennedy of Coral Ridge Ministries. The second is two significant news items: the sex-abuse scandal that is rocking the Catholic Church and the escalating violence in the Middle East. Several subscribers have asked me to comment on the endtime significance of these developments.

Preparing my response to these issues took considerable time, effort, and space. Thus, I decided to postpone the second installment of "The Bible and Alcohol" until the next issue. Adding this Bible study would have lengthen considerably this newsletter. Those who have been urging me to shorten my newsletters should be happy this time.

Before addressing the major issues of this newsletter, let me give you an update on Sabbath developments and my weekend seminars. Many of our subscribers appreciate this service.

SEVENTH-DAY PENTECOSTALS

In a telephone conversation with Mr. Daniel Botkins, the editor of GATES OF EDEN magazine, I learned about Seventh-day Pentecostal Churches. Mr. Botkins recently attended a rally of several Sabbath-keeping Pentecostal Churches in Terre Haute, Indiana.

In an email message, Mr. Botkins writes: "At the gathering I attended in Terre Haute, I met people from Indiana, Illinois, Tennessee, Arkansas, and Oklahoma. Meetings were held Friday night, Saturday morning and Saturday night, with a Biblically-kosher meal served midday Saturday. The Saturday night meeting started at 6 P.M.. and did not end until around midnight. Each meeting featured several singers and preachers of all ages.

"The oldest preacher there was 96-year-old Amos Bridwell, another retired seventh-day Pentecostal pastor. Brother Bridwell preached and sang for us and shared his testimony about being able to share the gospel that day with a young lady who works at the nursing home where he lives. It's encouraging to see that retirement, old age, and infirmity have not quenched the zeal in this elderly seventh-day Pentecostal saint. May the same be true for all seventh-day saints."

Daniel Botkin pastors a Messianic congregation in Peoria, Illinois and is editor and publisher of the bimonthly magazine GATES OF EDEN, which often has insightful articles. If you wish to receive a free sample copy, feel free to call (309) 698-9467. You can also read it online at this website: www.gatesofeden.org

In a recent email Pastor Botkins shared with me how the Lord led him to the acceptance of the Sabbath. You will appreciate reading the following two paragraphs:

“As a new Christian I was taught that the Sabbath commandment is no longer meant to be kept by Christians, because it was a temporary ceremonial precept which foreshadowed the spiritual rest that Christ brings to the soul of the repentant sinner. I could certainly see this symbolic aspect of the Sabbath in Matthew 11:28-30 (‘Come unto Me ... and ye shall find rest unto your souls’). However, as the years went by, I became increasingly dissatisfied and uncomfortable with this view. If the Sabbath was indeed a symbol of this important aspect of Christian experience, then Christians have all the more reasons to keep the Sabbath.

“I began an intense search for the truth about the Sabbath and how it should fit into the Christian life. Studying your books on the Sabbath, especially your scholarly work *FROM SABBATH TO SUNDAY*, helped to confirm my spiritual intuition that Christians should still keep the 7th-day Sabbath. Before reading your books, I read *FROM SABBATH TO THE LORD’S DAY*, a lengthy work by several prominent Christian scholars who attempted to refute your views. Ironically, their weak arguments against the Sabbath did more to persuade me that the Sabbath was valid. I heartily recommend your books to anyone who is serious about learning the truth about the Sabbath.”

It is gratifying to see the power of the printed page to lead since people to the acceptance of Biblical truths.

SHARING THE SABBATH IN A METHODIST CHURCH

Another encouraging report came to me from SDA Pastor/Evangelist Wes McDonald. I am posting excerpts of his message:

“A Methodist church has invited me to give a 4 week series on the subject of the Sanctuary. The 4 weeks extended to about 2 months now. I have had the opportunity to share with them the Sanctuary message including 1844, the judgment, and the 2300 days, etc. I have also had the opportunity to share with them a message on Daniel 2 and also one on the Signs of Jesus Return which was quite new to them.

“They asked also for me to explain to them doctrines such as the Sabbath that make us a distinct denomination. The last two Sundays I was able to share with them why we keep Saturday holy and how the Sabbath was changed from Saturday to Sunday. . . . The pastor said to me that it was ‘powerful,’ which I take to mean that he was deeply moved by the Holy Spirit in response to seeing the Biblical and historical presentation of the change. I am praying that I can return to them after the crusade is over.

“All of this would not have ever happened if it had not been for the godly influence of a SDA woman who had worked for the pastor as a church secretary in his last pastorate. He was so impressed with her that he told me he considered her a colleague, instead of a secretary and gave her the pulpit on one Sunday to preach. When she knew he was going to transfer to a new pastorate in my geographic area, she connected the two of us together. Through a providential sequence of events, I was permitted to begin the series on the Sanctuary and one thing has lead to another in the last 2 months. The value of the godly influence of church members can never be underestimated.”

Let us pray for Pastor Wes McDonal as he continues to witness to this Methodist congregation.

NEW RECORDING OF THE SABBATH SEMINAR

After spending over 1,000 hours developing my new SABBATH ENRICHMENT SEMINAR with 600 PowerPoint slides, I was hoping to make a new video/audio recording of these visual Sabbath presentations. My hope became a reality on March 15, 16, 17, 2002 at the First Fort Worth SDA Church, in Fort Worth, Texas.

The Texas Media Center worked with me for several days to improve the appearance of the PowerPoint slides and to prepare the stage for the recording. The recording lasted three days (Friday, Saturday, and Sunday) and was done before a live congregation. I wish to express my heartfelt gratitude to the whole team of about 10 people for the superb job that they did. If you ever need to make a professional recording of lectures or seminars, I would recommend contacting them at (817) 294-0053. They have some fine professional people on their team.

By the end of this week the editing process should be completed and I will receive the new masters for video and audio duplication. The Texas Media Center is also setting up this special Sabbath Seminar for DVD duplication. This process is more complex and will take several weeks. I will be sure to inform you when the new PowerPoint visual versions of my Sabbath Seminar are available.

I take this opportunity to inform you about a marvelous recording done by the Texas Media Center. It is entitled THE ANTICHRIST CHRONICLES: WHAT PROPHECY TEACHERS' AREN'T TELLING YOU! The speaker is Pastor Steve Wohlberg and the recording is available on video, DVD, audio, and as a book. You will find this high-tech, power-packed, theologically straight, and Christ-centered resource, to be a breath of fresh air. It is ideal for church services, prayer meetings, Bible studies, and evangelism. To order, call The Texas Media Center at (817) 294-0053 or visit their website at www.truthleftbehind.com.

ARE YOU MOVING TO ANDREWS UNIVERSITY AREA?

If you looking for a new home near Andrews University, you will be pleased to learn that my son, Dan Bacchiocchi, who is both an architect and a licensed builder, has just completed two lovely homes of 2000 and 2400 square feet respectively. They are located only four miles from Andrews, in two large wooded lots. For details, call Dan at (616) 471-9272 or email him at dan@keystonedevlopment.com.

UPCOMING WEEKEND SEMINARS

As a service to our subscribers, I am listing the date and the location of the upcoming seminars for the month of April 2002. Every Sabbath it is a great pleasure 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 the latter part of 2002. Each of the three seminars on the Sabbath, Second Advent, and Christian Life-style is now presented with PowerPoint slides which add a visual dimension to our message.

APRIL 5-6: LOS ANGELES CHINESE SDA CHURCH

Location: 3000 West Ramona Road, Alhambra, CA 91803

This rally is sponsored by the Chinese churches of the Los Angeles area. For information call Pastor Jonathan Foo at (626) 284-3433.

APRIL 12-13: ORLANDO, FL: KRESS MEMORIAL SDA CHURCH

Location: 746 Formosa Avenue, Winter Park, FL 32789

At this rally I will be able to use the new PowerPoint presentations improved by the Texas Media Center. For information call Pastor David Huber at (407) 644-4115 or (407) 260-2236

APRIL 19-20: LONDON, ENGLAND: BRIXTON SDA CHURCH

Location: Santley Street, Clapham, London SW4 7QG

For information call Pastor Hamilton Williams at (020) 8755-1722.

APRIL 24: LONDON, ENGLAND: CROYDON SDA CHURCH

Location: 95-96 Selhurst Road, South Norwood, Croydon, London SE25 6LH For information call Pastor Richard Holder at (020) 8405-2256

APRIL 26-27: LONDON, ENGLAND: STANBOROUGH PARK SDA CHURCH

Location: 609 St. Albans Road, Watford, London WD25 9JL

For information call Pastor Robert Vine at (01923) 678 740

THANK YOU FOR INVITING YOUR FRIENDS TO SUBSCRIBE

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 82: THE REPLY FROM DR. JAMES KENNEDY AND TWO RECENT DEVELOPMENTS
Samuele Bacchiocchi, Ph. D.,
Retired Professor of Theology, Andrews University

Before sharing my response to the letter I received from Dr. Kennedy, I would like to comment on two major recent developments. The first is the escalating conflict between Israelis and Palestinians, punctuated by daily bloodshed and destruction of human lives and property. The second is the child sex-abuse scandal that is rocking the Catholic church in many parts of the world. Several people have asked me what I think of these two developments. Usually I hesitate to express my thinking about political or religious issues that are beyond my sphere of competence. But since these developments are ENDTIME ISSUES that we cannot ignore, I decided to submit some reflections from a Biblical perspective.

THE CATHOLIC PRIESTS CHILD SEX-ABUSE SCANDAL

The problem of some Catholic priests sexually molesting children has been known for long time. The reason the problem did not make the headlines before, is simply because Catholic church leaders have clung to a policy of secrecy and defensiveness. Whenever a scandal surfaced, church officials dismissed parents' complaints, or made a financial settlement and reassigned the offending priest to another parish.

This policy of secrecy is finally coming to an end. *Newsweek* reports that "since this crisis exploded in January, accusations against nearly 200 priests have surfaced in 13 states and Washington, D. C. Sylvia Semarest, a Dallas lawyer who has reviewed court filings nationwide, estimates that 1,400 or more priests have been sued in recent years" (*Newsweek* April 1, p.53).

The problem of child sex-abuse by Catholic priests, is not confined to the USA. Reports are now coming in from several foreign countries where Catholic priests are being sued for their molestation of minors. These developments raise two questions: (1) What impact will the sex-abuse scandal have on the future of the Catholic church? (2) Will the Catholic Church reconsider her teaching on celibacy?

Sex-Scandals and the Future of the Catholic Church

There is no question that the exposure of offending priests and the ensuing legal actions is tarnishing the image of the Catholic Church. The long-term impact, however, may not be so damaging because it affords an opportunity to the Catholic Church to do some housecleaning. Note that the Catholic Church has weathered far worse scandals in the past. I am thinking, for example, of the dissolute popes of the Renaissance period who had no regard for the solemnity of their office and for the conscience of the people.

For example, Pope Alexander VI (1492-1503) has the notorious distinction of being the most corrupt pope of the Renaissance period. His dissolute life-style and his determination to advance the political fortunes of his numerous children, are a trade mark of his Pontificate. The Pope himself acknowledged the legitimacy of several of his children. Among Pope Alexander's mistresses after he became pope, the most famous was Giulia Farnese, called for her beauty, La Bella. The escapades of this pope would have filled the front pages of the ENQUIRER and satisfied the most sensational modern taste for scandals.

The fact that the Catholic Church has weathered scandals far worse than the present one, shows that the stability of the church cannot be easily shaken. The reason is that Catholics believe that some corrupt church leaders do not weaken the strength of their church, because Christ established her, is guiding her in the formulation of dogmas, and is leading her to her final triumph. In other words, Catholics are led to believe that the strength and stability of their church is not affected by corrupt church leaders, because ultimately Christ is in control of their church. This popular erroneous belief largely account

for the survival and growth of the Catholic Church, in spite of the scandals that have rocked the church during the course of her history.

Will Celibacy Ever Become an Option?

Some observers assume that current sex-scandals may cause the Catholic Church to reconsider her stand on priestly celibacy. This assumption ignores that Catholic beliefs and practices are based on historical teachings, not on popular opinion. The Catholic practice of requiring its clergy to remain permanently unmarried has a long and well-established historical tradition which cannot be altered.

Celibacy in the Catholic Church became a canonical obligation through the concerted effort of popes and church councils. The earliest legislation is canon 33 of the Council of Elvira (about A. D. 305), which states: "We decree that all bishops, priests, and deacons, and all clerics engaged in ministry are forbidden entirely to live with their wives and to beget children: whoever shall do so shall be deposed from clerical dignity."

The implementation of celibacy has been a difficult task for the Catholic church. This is indicated by the decretals of several popes (Damasus I, Siricius, Innocent I, and Leo I) who issued decretals enforcing the practice. The Lateran Council of 1059 threatened all the priest unwilling to give up their wives or concubines with the loss of employment and the right to celebrate the mass. The laity was warned against attending the services of married priests. The third canon states: "No one shall hear mass from a priest who to his certain knowledge keeps a concubine or a secret wife."

In recent years the traditional Catholic position on celibacy has been vigorously restated by the Second Vatican Council (1962-1965) and by Pope Paul VI's encyclical *Sacerdotalis Caelibatus—On Priestly Celibacy*, issued on June 24, 1967. In the light of the well-established historical Catholic teaching on priestly celibacy, it is unthinkable for any Pope, present or future, to make the practice optional.

Why is the Catholic Church so deeply committed to uphold their church law on celibacy when the Scripture clearly states: "A bishop must be above reproach, the husband of one wife" (1 Tim 3:2)? The fundamental reason is the need to ensure that all the Cardinals, bishops, priests, monks, nuns, and any persons who enters a religious order, are fully and exclusively committed to the church. Ultimately what is at stake is the power of the Papacy. By enforcing celibacy the Pope can count on the undivided allegiance to him by all those who serve the church in the various religious orders. Having no family ties, these men and women are tied exclusively to the church, which is symbolically embodied in the person of the Pope.

What all of this means is that for the Pope to relax the church stand on celibacy, would be tantamount to political suicide. It would weaken the very foundation of his power. Thus, the perpetration of celibacy is dictated more by political considerations, than by Biblical concerns.

In the light of these considerations we conclude that the current sex-scandals will have no significant negative impact on the future of the Catholic Church. On the contrary, the pressure on Catholic church leaders to root out molesters and screen more carefully applicants for the priesthood, will eventually strengthen the credibility and influence of the Catholic Church.

THE ESCALATING CONFLICT BETWEEN ARABS AND ISRAEL

On Passover night, Wednesday, March 26, a Hamas militant carried out a suicide bombing in the northern Israeli city of Netanya, killing at least 24 Israelis and injuring dozens of others. This brutal and senseless terroristic act has made the Western world forcibly aware of the renewed determination of the Palestinians to achieve their territorial objectives by means of terroristic acts.

The Israeli's response was immediate. On Friday, March 29, Israeli troops powered their way into Arafat's headquarters in the West Bank city of Ramallah and heavy fighting erupted in the compound, causing the loss of lives. Hundreds of Palestinians suspects have been arrested in this ongoing military operation which is expanding to other major Palestinian cities.

Israel's latest military offensive against the Palestinians and their chairman, Yasser Arafat, has not diminished their resolve to kill Israelis by using all the means at their disposals, especially suicide bombers. For the first time even women have offered to become martyrs for the Arab cause by serving as suicide bombers. The result has been a daily bloody spectacle of Palestinian suicide bombers blowing themselves up in public places in order to kill the largest number of Jews.

The escalating violence is causing people to wonder: Where is the rising tide of bloodshed leading to? Will a permanent peace between Israel and the Palestinians ever be possible? Could this local conflict escalate into an international war of apocalyptic proportions?

One thing is clear. The superiority of Israel's high-tech weaponry and of its well-trained army, is proving to be inadequate against a growing number of Palestinian guerrillas ready to die as martyrs for what they believe to be a Holy Religious War against Israel. The paradox is that while Israel has never been so powerful, at the same time it has never been so vulnerable. The escalating violence is hardening the attitudes and widening the gulf between the conflicting parties.

The strategy of the Palestinians consists in keeping up their suicide bombing of Israelis, knowing that the excessive retaliation of Israel's army will eventually trigger the intervention of the international community, especially the United States. The evening news have shown massive demonstrations in Arab and European countries against Israel's military operation. The Palestinians hope that the condemnation by the world's media and diplomats of Israel's excesses, will have an emotional impact on the Israelis themselves, thus weakening their resolve to continue the fight.

Will this strategy work? Can peace really be achieved through suicide-bombings designed to weaken the resolve of the Israelis? There is no question that the rising tide of bloodshed is disheartening and frustrating many Israelis, but there are no indications that they are prepared to give up the struggle for the survival of their nation. After all in its short history of the past 50 years, Israel has fought repeatedly to defend its land.

Are the Palestinians really willing to establish peaceful relations with Israel if they regain what they claim to be their own land? The answer is that very few Palestinians and Arabs in general, are really interested to normalize relations with Israel by establishing diplomatic, economic, and cultural ties.

In a penetrating article on the future of Israel which appeared in *Newsweek* (April 1, 2002), Henry Kissinger notes: "The number of Palestinian leaders holding this view [of peace with Israel] is minuscule. The fundamental schism is between those who want to bring about the destruction of Israel by continuing the present struggle, and those who believe that an agreement now would be a better strategy to rally forces for the ultimate showdown later on" (p.50). In other others, the divisive issue among the Palestinians and the Arabs in general, is not whether or not Israel should be destroyed—on this point they all agree—but when and how. Israel understand that the ultimate goal of the Arab world is

the destruction of their nation and consequently they are prepared to fight for their survival.

If Kissinger's assessment is correct, (and I believe it is), then it is wise to recognize that a permanent peaceful resolution to the Middle East conflict is not possible under present conditions. Instead, what might happen is an escalation of the war through the financial and military support of several Arab countries. The latest news is that Saddam Hussein is funding Palestinian suicide bombers, by offering money (US\$25,000.00) and homes to their relatives.

If, Arab countries like Iraq, Iran, Libya, and Syria become directly involved in arming the Palestinians against Israel, then, it is likely that some Western nations will join together in their support of Israel. The forming of such coalitions, could well lead to the countdown to the showdown described in the Bible as the "Battle of Armageddon" (Rev 16:14-16).

Is September 11 Leading to Armageddon?

Could it be that what began in the aftermath of September 11 as America's War on Terrorism, could eventually escalate in a global conflict between a coalition of Arab nations and Western countries? During his recent diplomatic visit to leading Arab countries to elicit their support for a possible showdown with Iraq, Vice President Dick Cheney discovered that his Arab hosts are more interested to help the Palestinians regain their lands than to disarm Iraq.

The proposal put forth by Crown Prince Abdullah for Israel to return to the 1967 frontiers in exchange for the normalization of relations with the Arab states, is unrealistic. The reason is that, as Henry Kissinger explains, "the 1967 borders leave a corridor as narrow as eight miles between Haifa and Tel Aviv and put the border of Israel at the edge of its international airport. Moreover, Israel would have to give up settlements containing approximately 200,000 inhabitants." (*Newsweek* April 1, p. 49).

If a more limited compromise solution to the Arabs-Israelis conflict is not found soon, then this regional conflict could easily escalate into a global conflict, engulfing many nations in what could become the countdown to the final showdown that precedes the coming of Christ.

The events that have transpired since September 11 reminds us of Jesus' prediction of the intensification of warfare before His coming. Christ describes this endtime sign as "the beginning of the sufferings" (Matt 24:6-8) which will lead to the "great tribulation" (Matt 24:21). Other prophetic writers explain more fully the endtime intensification of warfare.

For example, Joel foretells the coming of a great and terrible Day of the Lord (Joel 2:11) when God would gather all the nations in the valley of Jehoshaphat and execute judgment upon them (Joel 3:2). Similar description of a final conflict involving a gathering of nations against Israel are found in Zechariah 14:1-5 and Ezekiel 38, 39. God intervenes in this climactic global conflict, executing judgment upon the ungodly nations of the world. Daniel also speaks of a final "time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time" (Dan 12:1; cf. Dan 8:23-24).

The intensification of warfare before the Coming of Christ is portrayed dramatically in several visions of the book of Revelation. For example, in conjunction with the sixth plague, Revelation describes the preparation for a final eschatological battle, known as the battle of "Armageddon" (Rev 16:14-16). "Demonic spirits" are presented as going "abroad to the kings of the whole world, to assemble them for battle on the great day of God the Almighty" (Rev 16:14).

The terroristic acts carried out during the past few months at the World Trade Center, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Philippines, India, the Middle East, and other parts of the world,

could only have been inspired by “demonic spirits” controlling the mind of people. In his commentary on the book of Revelation, Henry B. Swete comments: “There have been times when nations have been seized by a passion for war which the historian can but imperfectly explain. It is such an epoch that the Seer foresees, but one which, unlike any that has come before it, *will involve the whole world in war*” (*The Apocalypse of St. John*, London 1951, p. 208).

The on-going war on terrorism with its network in many countries, causes us to ponder if indeed we are living in “such an epoch” when a “passion for war” inspired by “demonic spirits” is leading the world to the final showdown that precedes Christ’s coming. Through these endtime signs God is calling upon believers to live holy and godly lives while “waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God” (2 Pet 3:11-12).

THE REPLY FROM DR. JAMES KENNEDY

For several weeks I have been waiting for a reply from Dr. James Kennedy to my lengthy "Open Letter." Finally his reply came few days ago. Frankly, I was disappointed by his reply, because it ignores all the important issues I raised in my "Open Letter."

In his reply Dr. Kennedy expresses appreciation for all the information I sent him, including my four books. He limits his comments to two major areas. First, he assumes that my defense of the Sabbath is conditioned by my connection with Andrews University and affiliation with the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Second, he feels that the investigation he has conducted over the years has convinced him that the "historic Church of Christ" has been correct in teaching the apostolic origin of Sunday to commemorate Christ's resurrection.

In formulating my response I have addressed his two major comments. You should find the reply interesting. My major objective was to show to Dr. Kennedy two things: First, there are Bible scholars who are not conditioned by their denominational traditions. I believe that I am one of them. To make this point I have used as an example the recent research on the Biblical view of human nature.

Surprisingly the vast majority of evangelical scholars have rejected their denominational dualistic view of human nature, with the mortal body and immortal soul, and accepted instead the Biblical, Adventist wholistic view, where the soul is the animating principle of the body. I have chosen this example, because recently Dr. Kennedy preached a sermon on conscious life after death. This belief is a widespread deception that needs to be exposed. Ellen White reminds us that through the two great errors of Sunday sacredness and the immortality of the soul, the Evil One will bring about the final great deception.

My second objective has been to help Dr. Kennedy recognize the fallacy of his contention that "99% of the Church of Christ" has historically believed in the apostolic origin of Sunday. You will be able to judge for yourself to what extent I have succeeded in achieving these objective. More important than these immediate objectives, my ultimate goal is to help Dr. Kennedy, and countless religious leaders like him, recognize the deceptive nature of the two great errors of Sunday sacredness and immortality of the soul.

For the sake of accuracy, I will post the complete text of Dr. Kennedy's letter, before submitting my response.

THE TEXT OF DR. JAMES KENNEDY LETTER

March 15, 2002

Dr. Samuele Bacchiocchi
Biblical Perspectives
4990 Appian Way
Berrien Springs, MI 49103

Dear Dr. Bacchiocchi:

Thank you for your letter and other information concerning your views on the Sabbath and the Lord's Day.

Like yourself, I have over the years investigated the issues and have been convinced in my own mind that the historic Church of Christ has been correct in the position that it has taken. I assume from your connection with Andrews University that you are related to the Seventh-day Adventist movement, which, though I evidently disagree with their view of the Sabbath, I respect their sincerity and their zeal for the kingdom of God.

I thank you for your concern and your willingness to share the information that you have discovered. However, with nine ministries to run, four of which are global in scope, I really do not have the time to give to this discussion, which I feel has been adequately investigated and with which conclusions I and 99% of the Church of Jesus Christ historically have felt compelling.[I did not edit the garbled phrase].

Thank you again for your efforts. May God bless you as you endeavors to win people to Christ.

In His Name
Dr. James Kennedy, Ph.D.
Senior Minister

P. S. Thank you also for the complimentary copies of your four books.

THIS IS MY RESPONSE TO DR. KENNEDY'S LETTER

April 3, 2002

Dr. James Kennedy, Ph. D.
Senior Minister
Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church
555 N. Federal Highway
Fort Lauderdale, Florida 33308

Dear Dr. Kennedy:

Thank you for your letter of March 15, 2002 where you reply to my "Open Letter." Your willingness to make time in your busy schedule to read my lengthy letter is much appreciated. I fully understand that with nine ministries to run, it is impossible for you at this time to find time to discuss the Sabbath/Sunday question with me. My fervent hope and prayer is that sometimes in the future you will be able to make time to re-examine this important subject from a Biblical and historical perspective.

For the sake of brevity, I will limit my remarks to two main points of your letter: (1) Your assumption that my affiliation with the Seventh-day Adventist Church has determined my views on the Sabbath. (2) Your claim that your investigation conducted over the years has convinced you that "the historic Church of Christ has been correct in the position that it has taken" regarding the apostolic origin of Sunday to commemorate Christ's Resurrection.

IS MY SABBATH RESEARCH CONDITIONED BY MY ADVENTIST BACKGROUND?

Your assumption that my defense of the seventh-day Sabbath is determined by my affiliation with the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is based on the view that Biblical research is conditioned by the denominational affiliation of the authors. This is true in many cases, but there are Bible scholars who strive for objectivity, irrespective of their denominational affiliation. I like to think that I belong to such group.

A indication of my attempt to be objective is the fact that my doctoral dissertation *From Sabbath to Sunday* was published by the Pontifical Gregorian University with the official Catholic *imprimatur—approval*. In fact, I received a gold medal from Pope Paul VI for earning the academic distinction of *summa cum laude* for a research that challenges the prevailing Catholic and Protestant view of an apostolic origin of Sunday to commemorate Christ's resurrection. It is evident that the examining commission did not feel that the investigation was conditioned by my Adventist religious background. Furthermore, over hundreds of scholars of all denominations have favorably reviewed my dissertation. As I mentioned in my open letter, to protect the integrity of my research I publish my own books.

An Example of Objective Biblical Research

The number of conservative Bible scholars today who transcends their denominational affiliation is impressive. A good example is the recent re-examination of the Biblical view of human nature by scholars of all persuasions. In researching for my book *Immortality or Resurrection?* I was pleasantly surprised to discover that the vast majority of evangelical scholars have abandoned the dualistic view of human nature, consisting of a material, mortal body and a spiritual, immortal soul. Instead, these scholars have accepted the Biblical wholistic view, where body and soul are characteristics of the same person—the soul being the animating principle of the body.

Among the outstanding scholars who have recently rejected the belief in the immortality of the soul and embraced the Biblical wholistic view of human nature, three stand out in my mind: First, there is Oscar Cullmann, a respected scholar of your

Calvinistic religious tradition. His book *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Body?* has stirred up considerable controversy in the evangelical community, because it openly rejects as unbiblical (Platonic) the notion of the immortality of the soul. Second, there is John R. W. Stott, one of the most influential evangelical writer and preacher of our time. In his publications he offers compelling reasons for abandoning as unbiblical the belief in the immortality of the soul.

Lastly, I will mention Clark Pinnock, a most respected evangelical theologian who has served as President of the Evangelical Theological society and has written a foreword to my book *Immortality or Resurrection?* He laments the “tactics of harassment” which have been used to discredit evangelical scholars like himself who have abandoned the traditional dualistic view of human nature and its related doctrine of eternal torment in a fiery hell.

These three scholars are representative of over 400 authors cited in my book, all of whom have rejected their denominational teachings regarding conscious life after death prior to the resurrection. I submit this example simply to show that it is unfair to assume that Bible scholars are conditioned in their writings by the denominational affiliation.

When confronted with compelling Biblical evidences, individual scholars can afford to change their views on doctrines, because they speak for themselves, not for their churches. By contrast, Catholic and Protestant churches can hardly afford to do so without causing the meltdown of their denominations. The result of this dilemma is that “the historic Church of Christ” is burdened today with unbiblical doctrines such as the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness.

Your Sermon on Conscious Life After Death

The reason I referred to the recent research on the state of the dead, is because few months ago I heard your sermon about conscious life after death. Unfortunately, most of your evidence consisted of stories about near-death experiences. You made no attempt to discuss relevant Biblical texts. But our normative authority for defining the state of the dead must be, not subjective near-death experiences, but the objective revelation God has provided us in His Word (2 Pet 1:19).

Dr. Kennedy, we need to remember a point that Paul and Linda Badham bring out in their book *Immortality or Extinction?*, namely, that “any person hovering between life and death must be suffering profound physical and psychological stress. A brain starved of oxygen, drugged by hallucinatory painkillers, or excited by fever is hardly likely to function properly and who knows what visions could be accounted for by its disturbed conditions?” (p. 81).

May I ask you, Dr. Kennedy, Why is it that nearly all the reports of near-death experiences concern happiness and heavenly fulfillment, but no glimpses of the fiery torments of hell? Could it be that when people are dying they prefer to dream about the bliss of paradise rather than the suffering of hell?

Research has shown that the visions of heaven are conditioned by one’s religious background. Studies of near-death experiences of Hindu patients indicate that some of them had the experience of being brought to heaven on a cow. It is evident that such reports about afterlife experiences reflect the personal beliefs of the patients. What people experience in the process of dying is most likely conditioned by their personal beliefs.

Lazarus was brought back to life after being clinically dead for four days. Yet he did not report any exciting out-of-the-body experiences. The reason is simple. Death according to the Bible is the cessation of life of the whole person, body and soul. There is no form of conscious existence between death and resurrection. The dead rest unconsciously in their tombs until Christ will call them forth on the glorious day of His coming.

Dr. Kennedy, if you take time to read the recent research produced by evangelical scholars, including members of your Calvinistic tradition, you will be surprised to discover that your dualistic view of human nature lacks Biblical support. The fact that “99% of the Church of Christ” has historically believed in the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, does not guarantee the orthodoxy of these two doctrines. The touchstone of Christian beliefs is not their popularity or antiquity, but their conformity to Biblical teachings. (I am enclosing a gift copy of *Immortality or Resurrection?* that you may wish to read before preaching your next sermon on the state of the dead).

HAS THE “HISTORIC CHURCH OF CHRIST” BEEN UNANIMOUS IN VIEWING SUNDAY AS AN APOSTOLIC INSTITUTION ESTABLISHED TO COMMEMORATE CHRIST’S RESURRECTION?

In your letter, Dr. Kennedy, you affirm that your investigation conducted “over the years” has convinced you “that the historic Church of Christ has been correct in the position it has taken” regarding the apostolic origin of Sunday to commemorate Christ’s resurrection. You find support for your conviction in the fact that “99% of the Church of Christ historically” has held this position.

In response to your argument I will make two observations. First, contrary to your contention, historically the “Church of Christ” has been very much divided over the Sabbath/Sunday question. This is indicated by the fact since the sixteenth-century Reformation over 3000 treatises have been published debating this subject . About 1000 studies have been published during our lifetime. Truly the Sabbath has had no rest.

The Reformers themselves were divided on the Sabbath/Sunday question. Luther rejected the Sabbath as a Mosaic institution given to the Jewish people and accepted Sunday as a convenient institution established by the Catholic Church to facilitate a weekly church attendance. For him another weekday like Monday or Tuesday, would have fulfilled the same purpose.

On the other hand, Calvin taught that the Sabbath is a creation ordinance given to mankind and Sunday is the continuation of the moral principle (one day in seven) of the Fourth Commandment. Thus, Sunday is to be observed as the Christian Sabbath. For a discussion of the Reformers’ view of the Sabbath/Sunday question, see chapter 1 of my book *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness*.

Scholars have been equally divided over the question of the origin of Sunday. Two examples will suffice to make my point. The first is the doctoral dissertation of Prof. Willy Rordorf, a Calvinistic scholar of your religious tradition from Basel University, in Switzerland. His dissertation *Sunday: The History of the Day of Rest and Worship in the Earliest Centuries of the Christian Church*, is regarded by scholars as a classic in its field. In his dissertation Rordorf defends the apostolic origin of Sunday, but after reading my dissertation where I examine his arguments, he reconsidered his views. In the introduction to the Italian edition of his book, Rordorf wrote that my dissertation offered a “needed corrective” to his conclusions. It is encouraging to see that mature scholars are willing to reconsider their views.

The second example is the scholarly symposium produced by seven British/American Protestant scholars and entitled *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*. The research was sponsored by the Tyndale Fellowship for Biblical Research in Cambridge, England and published by Zondervan. Several of the contributors requested copies of my dissertation and articles. After reading my research they informed me by letter that they changed their thinking on certain issues and had to rewrite sections of their chapters.

It is significant that these Protestant scholars who contributed to the symposium *From Sabbath to the Lord’s Day*, trace the origin of Sunday, not back to the resurrection/appearances of Christ as you do, Dr. Kennedy, but to the post-apostolic period. For example, Prof. Max B. Turner writes: “We must conclude that it is barely

imaginable that first-day Sabbath observance commenced before the Jerusalem Council [A. D. 49]. Nor can we stop there; we must go on to maintain that first-day Sabbath observance cannot be understood as a phenomenon of the apostolic age or of the apostolic authority at all" (pp. 135-136).

Dr. Kennedy, I have cited the two above examples simply to show that there are respected scholars belonging to what you call "the historic Church of Christ," who are willing to re-examine the Sabbath/Sunday question, and reconsider their views. I would urge you to do the same. You want to be sure that what you preach and teach to the millions through your TV and radio network, is biblical truth, not denominational traditions.

The impression I received from reading your sermon on "The Gift of Rest" and other papers you have written on the Sabbath/Sunday question, is that your busy schedule has not allowed you to examine closely the Biblical texts and the historical documents that you quote. I have shown in my "Open Letter," that you misquote the statements of Barnabas and Justin Martyr, and misinterpret the meaning of Christ's Resurrection. The latter is presented in the NT as an existential reality, not a liturgical practice. Paul speaks of the "Power of the Resurrection" (Phil 3:10), not of the "Day of the Resurrection." The designation of Sunday as "The Day of the Resurrection" is nowhere to be found in the early Christian literature until the writings of Eusebius of Caesarea in A. D. 325.

The reason I have spent considerable time interacting with you, Dr. Kennedy, is because I greatly respect and admire your preaching. I regard you as one of the best expository preachers in America today. My sincere desire is to strengthen your ministry by alerting you about some "problem areas" in your teachings. If left unchecked, these "problem areas" could undermine your credibility as a teacher and preacher of the Word of God.

Thank you again for the opportunity to dialogue with you. May the Lord continue to richly bless your life and ministry with His wisdom and grace.

Christian regards

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