

# Holy Days Or Holidays?

## Endtime Issues No. 32

30 November 1999

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### Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Newsletter:

May I express my heartfelt appreciation to all of you who have taken time to email me messages of condolences for the sudden death of my father. While reading your messages I was forcefully reminded of the fact that we belong to the family of God, where we share together our joys and sorrows.

It was a privilege for me to conduct my father's funeral on Monday, November 15, at 10:00 in Rome, Italy. It was an unforgettable emotional experience. I do not recall ever having shed so many tears during a sermon. I did my best to keep my composure, but sometimes the emotion was overwhelming.

The most surprising aspect of the funeral was the presence of many non-Adventists whom I had never met before. The OSTIA SDA CHURCH by the seaside outside Rome, to which my father belonged, has less than 100 members. Yet at the funeral there were over 200 persons, including two local protestant ministers of the Baptist and Pentecostal churches respectively. I could not believe that my father had touched so many lives.

My father was a simple man with only an elementary education, but he loved the Lord and diligently studied His Word daily. About six years ago when he lost 95% of his sight, he bought the whole Bible in cassettes and listen to them, not only during the free hours of the day, but even during the waking hours of the night. He had memorized practically the whole New Testament. Last July I spent a week with my parents in Rome. Father constantly bombarded me with theological questions. Whenever I refer to a Bible text, he could quote non-stop the verses that followed.

What my father loved most was visiting people and sharing with them the blessings of God's Word. I vividly remember his smiling face when he came back late at night after giving a Bible study to one of his many contacts. I often wondered where he found the strength to go out in the evening to give Bible studies after a hard working day in construction. Well, it seems that sharing the truths of God's Word re-energized him at the end of heavy working day.

Perhaps the greatest contribution of my father to my life has been his constant encouragement to stand up for what I believe to be Biblical truth, even if it means facing criticism, ridicule, and rejection. How often he would say to me: "Son, you stand up for what you know to be God's truth. The Lord will honor your commitment. Ultimately, what counts is not what people says about you but what God thinks of you."

In many ways this admonition has been the guiding light of my life. Throughout my life I have taken a stand on several controversial issues which have generated volumes of "hate mail" as well as countless expressions of appreciation. The latest example is the stand I took against the rock music I heard at youth gatherings in Australia. Some condemned my behavior as intolerant, offensive, insensitive, etc. I read all those messages remembering my father's admonition: "Son, ultimately what counts is not what people say about you, but what God thinks of you."

I would like to take this opportunity to thank God for giving me godly parents who have been a source strength and inspiration throughout my life. I look forward with great anticipation to meet my father on that joyful resurrection morning, when God will wipe out all tears from our eyes, and sorrow and death will be no more. May this Blessed Hope

motivates each one of us today to live holy and godly lives in the joyful expectancy of Christ's coming.

## UPDATE ON BOOK ON THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC

In the previous newsletter I informed you about the hundreds of reports I received from different parts of the world about the adoption of rock/pop music in Adventist churches. These reports have convinced me of the need to prepare a timely study dealing with this divisive issue. Frankly, I was not aware of the global extent of the problem.

Many of you wrote to me about how rock music is gaining acceptance in our schools. A brother emailed me this message which I am posting with his permission. He wrote: "My son of 17 is trying to come out of rock music. He is gaining understanding of its deep root and causative affects it has on him. He relates it to his drug and alcohol experience which started at Thunderbird Academy in Scottsdale, AZ. It appears that no one at that school had an eye for what was happening and soon he was in so deep that he nearly overdosed on LSD. . . . My church is deeply into Christian Rock & Roll for our youth and I hate it. Some of the baby boomer adults love it and they are the ones in charge for the most part. The youth pastor brought it in to get kids from the local university."

Any sane person must question the legitimacy of using rock music, which is associated with sex, drugs, and violence, to entice young people to come into the church. Such method ignores that the medium of rock music distorts the message of the Gospel, leading young people to accept a Christ who is more like Michael Jackson than Jesus of Nazareth.

The problem, in my view, is not so much our youth but our youth leaders. Some of them have grown up on a steady diet of rock music, and consequently they do not see anything wrong in promoting it. This is happening not only in our churches but even in our publications, as the forthcoming book will document. For example, in the March 20, 1999 issue of INSIGHT (an SDA paper for teens), there is an article "What About Christian Rock?" The author says: "I find many criticisms about [rock] music laughable." He continues saying: "Does your music increase your faith in God and love for Him? If so, then keep listening to it. If not, be willing to make good changes or turn it off" (p. 7).

Are the feelings of a teenager a safe guide to determine whether or not to listen to rock music? I recall asking two teenagers who were standing next to me at the back of a 18+ SDA campmeeting tent in Australia: "Do you think that Jesus would feel welcomed here tonight watching this wild rock band?" (Believe me, the band in question was really wild. Kids jumping up and down while playing a heavy rock, night-club type of music). They replied: "Surely, Jesus would love to be here tonight." It is evident that for them Jesus was someone like Michael Jackson who offered them night club type of excitement. The problem with this view is that the Jesus of Christian Rock is not the Jesus of Biblical revelation.

To better understand the issues of Christian rock I have been gathering material during the past few days. I have purchased a dozen of good books and checked out from our James White Library about 50 books, including two doctoral dissertations. One of the dissertation is by Wolfgang Stefani on "THE CONCEPT OF GOD AND THE SACRED MUSIC STYLE." This is a most revealing study that shows the correlation between the people's concept of God and their sacred music. I find this to be a fundamental concept that can help us understand the deceptive theology of some of the contemporary Christian music, which largely stems from our self-centered and hedonistic culture. I am addressing this question in one of the chapters.

The reading I have done these last few days is suggesting the possibility that there could some endtime significance in the current promotion of "Christian" rock music in Christian churches worldwide. This could well be part of the mastermind strategy to promote the endtime false worship described in the Three Angels Message of Revelation 14. The false worship promoted by the apocalyptic spiritual Babylon, derives its inspiration from the false worship promoted by ancient Babylon. You recall the golden

image on the Plain of Dura and the fiery furnace prepared for those who refused to do homage to king Nebuchadnezzar. Music was used to unite the vast throng in the act of false worship. When the music played, all were to bow down.

Could it be that the summon of The Angels Message to come out of spiritual Babylon, by rejecting its false worship, includes also the rejection of the rock music of Babylon? Could it be that soon the whole world will be gathered in the antitypical, apocalyptic Plain of Dura and when the music plays, many who have absorbed worldly music, will easily capitulate before the overmastering deception of false worship? Could it be that by adopting the music of Babylon we may not be able to sing the New Song of Moses and of the Lamb that we have hoped for? This is something worth pondering!

Providentially the Lord is bringing together the new book THE CHRISTIAN AND ROCK MUSIC in unexpected ways. Five music professors/specialists have offered to contribute chapters to this book dealing with various aspects of rock music. One chapter will include the testimonies of former rock players who will share how rock music affected their spiritual, physical, and moral life. Incidentally, if you or someone you know, has an inspiring testimony to share about their deliverance from rock music, please let me know. We might be able to use it. Our goal is to have the book out before the General Conference, June 2000. Pray for this project. May the Lord give us the wisdom to address this sensitive issue in a balanced way, without being condemnatory or compromising. Our concern is to encourage the young and the not-so-young to take a stand against the music of Babylon and to sing the New Song of their deliverance.

## **AN ENCOURAGING EXPERIENCE**

Two nights ago I received a telephone call from an Evangelical Lutheran minister who had emailed me three messages, all of which for strange reasons came blank. During the half-an-hour conversation, he told me how somebody had directed him to my website ([www.biblicalperspectives.com](http://www.biblicalperspectives.com)) where he found my research on the Sabbath. He downloaded several chapters from my latest book **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE** which he read very carefully. He told me: "I am calling you to let you know that your book has made a Sabbath believer out of me." He appreciated the compelling Biblical answers he found to the many questions that had troubled him for long time. He went on asking me if I would sell him the complete set of my 15 books for his church library. Rest assured that I was glad to offer him the complete set at a very special price.

This Lutheran minister told me that he plans to share his new found truths with his congregation. I am looking forward to hear from him about the outcome of his efforts. Let us pray for him. I can only thank God for the providential way He is using, especially my latest book **THE SABBATH UNDER CROSSFIRE**, to help sincere people accept the Sabbath truth. Since the book came out early this year, over 20 ministers of different faiths have told me that the book has helped them to accept the validity and value of the Sabbath. Some of them, as I have reported in previous newsletters, have led the members of their congregations to accept the Sabbath.

## **A UNIQUE SABBATH TRAIL**

Sometime ago I was invited to speak in Washington, NH, in what is known as the birthplace of the first Sabbathkeeping Adventist Congregation which was established in the autumn of 1844 by William Farnsworth. The original church still exists and is used during the Summer months by our fellow believers. It is a unique church without electricity or inside toilet facilities. On the commemorative Sabbath I spoke there, about 200 fellow believers attended the services.

Pastor Merlin Knowles of the Washington church, in an answer to prayer, was impressed to build a Sabbath Trail that would beautifully tell the story of the Sabbath to visitors of all denominations who visit the historic church each year.

This unique one mile long trail is located in the woods surrounding the church with thirty-one sites where visitors can sit on benches and read attractively engraved granite markers that tell the story of the Sabbath from Creation to the New Earth.

I would like to encourage any interested to make a visit to the Sabbath Trail either in person or via the Internet at: <http://www.tagnet.org/washington/> You will find this to be a most pleasant experience.

## HOLY DAYS OR HOLIDAYS?

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**AN INTRODUCTORY NOTE.** The following essay is an article I recently wrote and submitted to LIBERTY magazine. The article has been accepted for publication. I thought you might appreciate reading it ahead of time. The article focuses on the efforts of the Catholic church to promote her religious annual holy days as civil holidays. I believe that this is a significant endtime development that deserves our attention. Feel free to share with me your reactions.

Should the State protect the observance of religious Holy Days by making them civil holidays? The answer of those committed to the separation between Church and State is clearly "NO!" Civil laws should not be passed to protect the observance of the religious Holy Days of a particular church. Such laws violate the First Amendment of the American Constitution: "Congress shall make no laws respecting an establishment of religion."

Recent developments, however, indicate that some churches are committed to protect the observance of their Holy Days by means of civil legislation, even if this means violating the First Amendment. For example, the new *Catechism of the Catholic Church* explicitly states: "In respecting religious liberty and the common good of all, Christians should seek recognition of Sunday and the Church's Holy Days as legal holidays."<sup>1</sup> The religious liberty to which the *Catechism* alludes is not the freedom of all religions to observe their respective Holy Days, but the freedom of Catholics to observe their own Holy Days under the protection of civil legislation.

The same appeal is made by Pope John Paul II's in his Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*: "In the particular circumstances of our time, Christians will naturally strive to ensure that civil legislation respects their duty to keep Sunday holy."<sup>2</sup> By calling for Sunday legislation to protect Sunday observance, the Pope ignores the discriminatory nature of such legislation against those who observe Saturday or other days of the week.

The Catholic Church is not only urging Christians "to seek recognition of Sunday and of the Church's Holy Days as legal holidays," but is also employing the diplomatic channels and influence of the Holy See to achieve this objective. The Holy See, which is the moral and juridical representative of the Catholic Church, is actively involved in persuading the international community of nations to recognize Catholic Holy Days as legal holidays.

The efforts of the Holy See have been most successful. In almost all the countries where the Catholic Church exercises a dominant influence, the local governments have made the Catholic Holy Days national civil holidays. In my native Italy, for example, as well as in France, Spain, Portugal, and all Central and South American countries, August 15 is a national holiday that commemorates the Catholic belief in the assumption of Mary to heaven. The same is true of November 1, a national holiday that commemorates what the Catholic church calls "All saints day."

Other countries are currently urged to recognize Catholic Holy Days as legal holidays. Croatia, for example, signed an agreement with the Holy See on February 11, 1999 regarding juridical questions. Article 9 of the agreement explicitly states as follows:

"Sunday and the following Holy Days will be free from work:

- a) January 1, commemoration of Mary, the most holy Mother of God, New Year;
- b) January 6, the Epiphany of the Lord or the Holy Magi;
- c) Monday following Easter-Sunday;
- d) August 15, the Assumption of the Blessed virgin Mary;
- e) November 1, all the saints;
- f) December 25, the Birth of the Lord;
- g) December 26, first day after Christmas, St. Stephan."<sup>3</sup>

**The Constitutionality of Religious Holidays.** The attempt to influence national governments to adopt as national, civil holidays, the religious Holy Days of a particular church, clearly violates the separation between Church and State. Such a violation does not seem to preoccupy the Catholic church, concerned as she is in advancing her own cause, even if it means sacrificing the fundamental principle of the separation between Church and State.

In a speech entitled "The Vatican's Role in World Affairs: The Diplomacy of Pope John Paul II," Michael Miller, CSB, President of the University of St. Thomas and former member of the Secretariat of State of the Holy See from 1992 to 1997, states that the goals of the Pope "are, admittedly, a mixture of the religious and the more narrowly political. John Paul, however, is not constrained by American ideas of the separation of Church and State, but pursues what he regards as the common good of all humanity."<sup>4</sup>

With candid frankness Miller acknowledges that "John Paul is not constrained by American ideas of the separation of Church and State." Instead, his concern is to "pursue what he regards as the common good of all humanity." The problem with the Pope's policy is his mistaken identification of the "common good of all humanity," with what is good of the Catholic Church. But, what is good for the Catholic church, is not necessarily good for society as a whole.

For the Pope or any church leader to impose their own church Holy Days as legal holiday for the rest of society, means to violate the freedom of those who do not accept such Holy Days. History teaches us that such policy has been fraught with frightful consequences. Countless "heretics" have been tortured and executed for refusing to accept the peculiar beliefs promoted by the dominant church for "the good of all mankind."

To prevent a repetition of the past religious intolerance, it is imperative to ensure that no one church succeeds in imposing her religious agenda on the rest of society. This is not an easy task, because often religious agendas are concealed and promoted as a social and secular programs for the good of humanity.

**The "Secular" Benefits of Sunday Laws.** A case in point is the promotion of Sunday Laws on the basis of social, cultural, and family values. This strategy is evident even in the Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini* where the Pope downplays the religious aspects of Sunday Laws, highlighting instead the social, cultural, and family values. For examples, John Paul says: ""Through Sunday rest, daily concerns and tasks can find their proper perspectives: the material things about which we worry give way to spiritual values; in a moment of encounter and less pressured exchange, we see the face of the people with whom we live. Even the beauties of nature-too often marred by the desire to exploit, which turns against man himself-can be rediscovered and enjoyed to the full."<sup>5</sup>

By emphasizing the human and "secular" benefits and values of Sunday Laws, John Paul knows that he can gain greater international acceptance for such legislation. It is worth noting in this regard the U. S. Supreme Court decision in *McGowan v. Maryland*, 366 U. S. 420 (1961) that upheld Maryland's Sunday Closing Laws as not violative of the Federal Constitution. The reason the Court justified the state's interest in protecting a common day of Sunday rest is that Sunday has become secularized in the American society. The Court said: "We believe that the air of the day is one of relaxation rather than religion."<sup>6</sup>



This reality is recognized not only by the Pope but also by Protestant churches. For examples, the Lord's Day Alliance of the USA, an ecumenical organization supported by over twenty Protestant denominations, frequently publishes articles in her *Sunday* magazine, emphasizing the secular and social benefits of Sunday Laws.

A good example is the article by Attorney Michael Woodruff, entitled "The Constitutionality of Sunday Laws, published in *Sunday*. Woodruff writes: "If we must justify the retention of the Lord's Day as a secular day of rest, we must find compelling secular grounds to make it so. . . . If Courts view Sunday laws as having the direct effect of 'advancing religion,' then under current First Amendment doctrine, such laws must be unconstitutional. However, if the laws are generally applicable and have a religion-neutral purpose, then the effect is likely to be seen incidental. To this end, the distinction between religious practice and the form of laws is important."<sup>7</sup>

The Pope is well aware of the need to maintain this distinction. Thus in his Pastoral Letter, he appeals to the social and human values that Sunday Laws guarantee and promote. He writes: " In our historical context there remains the obligation [of the state] to ensure that everyone can enjoy the freedom, rest and relaxation which human dignity requires, together with the associated religious, family, cultural and interpersonal needs which are difficult to meet if there is no guarantee of at least one day a week on which people can both rest and celebrate."<sup>8</sup>

The problem with the above reasoning is the definition of "one day a week" as meaning exclusively "Sunday." Both the Catholic Church and the Lord's Day Alliance are committed to ensure that Sunday is the weekly day of rest protected by law. This policy ignores that we live today in a pluralistic society where there are Christian and Jews who observe Saturday as their day of rest, and Muslim who may wish to observe their Friday.

To be fair to all the religious and nonreligious groups holding different days of rest and/or worship, the State would have to pass legislation guaranteeing different legal holidays to different people. The implementation of such legislation is inconceivable, because it would disrupt our socioeconomic system.

The issue at stake is not the right of Catholics, Protestants, Jews, Muslims, or other religious groups, to protect their weekly and annual Holy Days, but rather their right to seek State recognition for their own Holy Days as legal holidays. The latter is an attempt to advance the interest of one's own religion by infringing on the freedom of others.

Imagine what would happen in America if the Jews succeeded to persuade Congress to pass a law making their weekly Sabbath and their seven annual Holy Days, as legal, national holidays. Most Americans would strongly denounce such a law as unconstitutional, sectarian, and discriminatory. Yet, this is exactly what has happened in many countries where the Catholic Church has been able to influence the political process. The Catholic Holy Days have been enacted into national legal holidays, causing considerable problems for minorities who observe different days.

This was my experience while growing up in Rome, Italy. Saturday was a school day. Only Sunday was the legal weekly day of rest. Being unable to attend school on Saturday on account of my religious convictions, I faced constant problems, including the threat of expulsion from school. To justify my school absences our family doctor wrote a most ingenious medical certificate, stating that on Saturday I was "psychologically incapacitated."

In many countries thousands of Sabbatarians have suffered over the years all sort of recriminations and persecutions for refusing to violate their religious convictions by working on Saturday. In these instances, Sunday laws have served to penalize those who for religious reasons choose to rest and worship on a different day of the week.

**The State and the Holy Days.** Should the State guarantee to all its citizens the right to observe their weekly and annual Holy Days? The answer is "Yes" and "No." The State must protect the rights of all its citizens to practice their religion, including their Holy Days. But this does not mean that the State must recognize as legal holidays all the religious Holy Days observed by the various religious groups within the State. Such a policy would disrupt the socioeconomic system of our society, besides violating the First Amendment.

The State can protect the right of various religious groups to observe their Holy Days, simply by enacting a legislation that encourages employers to accommodate the religious convictions of their employees. In most cases this can be done without causing undue hardship to companies, because the short-work week already provides workers with two or three free days. This means that all that a company needs to do is to set up the work schedule of its workers in accordance to their rest-day preference.

There are, however, insensitive companies that show no consideration to the religious convictions of their workers. In such cases, the solution is to be found not in Sunday or Saturday laws, but in a legislation that would urge employers to accommodate the religious convictions of their workers, when this does not cause undue hardship to their business.

The practice of one's religion, including one's Holy Days, is bound to cause some problems in the secular and pluralistic society in which we live. This is part of the Christian calling to live in the world, without becoming part of it. Christians cannot always expect a smooth sailing.

Summing up, Christian and non-Christian religions have the right to seek recognition from the State to practice their religion unhindered, but they cannot expect the State to protect their Holy Days by making them civil holidays. Such a law would violate the fundamental principle of the separation between Church and State which has proven to be the best guarantee of religious liberty for all.

## NOTES

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church* ((Vatican City, 1994), p. 528.
2. Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.
3. The text of the agreement can be accessed at the following website:  
<http://www.hbk.hr/vijesti/1996/talug/tprv.htm>
4. J. Michael Miller, "The Vatican's Role in World Affairs. The Diplomacy of Pope John Paul II," Speech delivered in the Fall of 1997 at the University of St. Thomas in Houston, Texas.
5. Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, paragraph 67.
6. Cited by Michael J. Woodruff, "The Constitutionality of Sunday Laws," *Sunday 79* (January-April 1991), p. 9.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.
8. Pastoral Letter *Dies Domini*, paragraph 66.

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