

The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2009



Enjoying the serenity
of God's Sabbath

BSA — The Bible Sabbath Association

Jesus said, "the Son of Man is Lord also of the Sabbath"

The Sabbath Sentinel

May–June 2009 Volume 61, No. 3 Issue 537

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Our Cover: "The Sabbath was made for man" to commune with his Heavenly Father.

(Source: Dreamstime)

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Christianity: The Answer to the Despair of Secularism

According to a recent survey of American religious practice, religious observance is at an all-time low. Two-thirds of Americans no longer attend church regularly. Ten percent of Americans no longer believe in God. Another 15% declare that they have no religion at all.

John Adams, one of the American founders, once stated "Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate for the government of any other."

Around the globe we see societies either going to the extremes of religion (Islam and militant Hinduism) or to complete secularism. There seems to be no place in the middle for a rational religion supportive of individualism and free thought, such as Christianity.

In a recent commentary on CNS News (April 10, 2009), Senator Sam Brownback of Kansas, a devout Christian who is staunchly pro-life, lamented the current downward trend in the zeal of Americans toward religion. Here are a few of Senator Brownback's comments.

There is now abundant social science data pointing to a correlation between a falloff in religious practice and a host of disturbing trends. Low religious practice in families is correlated to poor academic performance for children, more behavioral problems, poorer quality of parent-child relationships, higher rates of drug and alcohol abuse, lower rates of marriage, and higher rates of non-marital sexual activity, including cohabitation. While family breakdown in the United States is less advanced than it is in many European countries, it is becoming increasingly clear that unless our families and communities are strong, government will be required to step into the breach to address the social problems that result.

This is why I am concerned about surveys that show a decline in religious observance and a trend towards secularization. God should be welcome in the public square. Yet, according to the survey data, fewer of my fellow Americans feel the need for God and His providential care.

Faith has helped make America strong. We ought not turn our backs on history or we will come to

regret the future. The role of religion has been enormously beneficial, and its value must not be ignored. To walk away from God is to walk away from our future. Hope comes in the knowledge that there is something far bigger and far greater than ourselves in which to invest our lives, our souls and our sacred honor (<http://www.cnsnews.com/public/content/article.aspx?RsrcID=46441>).

I have to second the senator's concerns. During the last century we witnessed the worst carnage of human life in the history of mankind at the hands of secular governments. We have too soon forgotten the lessons of National Socialism (the Nazi Party) and fascism. Estimates of the number of deaths during World War II reach as high as 72 million. And, we also witnessed the scourge of communism during the last century. The number of deaths caused by this godless ideology is around 35 million in Russia and at the least 100 million in China. Add to that the millions of lives sacrificed to the gods of communism in countries such as North Korea, Cambodia, Laos, Cuba, and Vietnam.

Of course, I have yet to mention one of secularism's banner public policy, abortion. In the United States alone more than 55 million babies have been killed through the practice of abortion since it was made legal in 1973. Remember, this is only in the United States. Abortion is practiced widely throughout the world. In Western countries the number of abortions far outpaces the number of live births, and in China forced abortion is practiced routinely as a means of population control. According to research from the Guttmacher Institute, "More than one-third of the approximately 205 million pregnancies that occur worldwide annually are unintended, and about 20% of all pregnancies end in induced abortion." That is 40 million abortions annually. The report goes on to state, "Approximately 220,000 children worldwide lose their mothers every year from abortion-related deaths" ("Facts on Induced Abortion Worldwide," the Guttmacher Institute).

When people leave God behind, they have nowhere to turn for help or comfort during those difficult periods that everyone experiences. Secular

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Open the Wardrobe

By Kenneth Westby



The wardrobe was the focus of one of C. S. Lewis' books for children. In Lewis' popular series *The Chronicles of Narnia*, his best known book, *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe*, told the story of another world, another reality that was experienced by entering the wardrobe. It was a portal to another time and place. I was reminded of the Sabbath.

The Second World War has just begun and the four Pevensie children are sent out of London to the English countryside to avoid the Blitz of German bombs. They are cared for by an old professor and his housekeeper. One rainy day the children go exploring the house and the youngest, Lucy, becomes curious about the wardrobe in an empty room. Wardrobes preceded our closets and were large and important pieces of furniture for the hanging and storage of clothing.

Lucy opened the fine apple wood wardrobe, stepped inside, and found herself entering another world, the magical Kingdom of Narnia. Then begins a series of adventures that involve all the children—trials, dangers, mysteries, lessons learned of good and evil, and at the conclusion of this captivating tale, a happy ending.

It is a charming story conveying a profoundly religious morality message. The hero that ends up saving Narnia from the forces of evil is a resurrected lion, named Aslan. Lucy and her siblings join Aslan in his righteous fight. Upon victory they're appointed kings and queens in the lion's kingdom, ruling until adulthood.

Eventually they re-enter the back of the wardrobe leaving behind the land of Narnia, and suddenly they are once again children in the wardrobe hiding from Mrs. MacReady, the housekeeper. Somehow time in Narnia was different; only a few minutes had passed in their English countryside home.

You've probably read the book or seen the movie. Each of our four children read *The Chronicles of Narnia*—my two daughters read them many times. It is amazing what inspiration and lessons can be imparted to children by a fantasy novel that dares to promote godly, uplifting themes.

Beauty is What God Does So Well

God makes all things beautiful and the marvels of his creation can take your breath away. Whether



creatures, flowers, or stars, they are all beautiful in different and amazing ways and though very real, carry an element of fantasy. The Sabbath is a creation of God, and it too has a beauty, sadly undiscovered by most of mankind.

We call the entire created order the "cosmos." Cosmos literally means "order" and "beauty;" the latter aspect survives in the modern word "cosmetic."

God knows beauty. There are components or ingredients that combine to make things beautiful

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Michaelangelo, Savonarola, and Kabbalistic Secrets in the Sistine Chapel



by Daniel Botkin

DISCLAIMER & WARNING: This article is not meant to endorse or encourage the study of Kabbalah. Just because Kabbalah is Jewish does not mean it is kosher. Some Kabbalistic ideas are harmless, some are even biblical, but some are dangerous. —DB

Michaelangelo was born on March 6, 1475, in a small Italian town near Florence where he rose to fame as one of the greatest artists in history. The city of Florence was administered by Lorenzo de Medici. Lorenzo was very wealthy, well educated, and very cultured. Lorenzo saw to it that the arts flourished in Florence.

This was at the height of the Renaissance. The word *renaissance* means “rebirth,” but the Renaissance was not a spiritual rebirth as Christians understand rebirth. Rather, it referred to the re-emergence of Greek and Roman paganism. It was a neo-paganism that celebrated man's greatness. It could be called humanism.

The man-centered humanism of the Renaissance is eloquently expressed in Michaelangelo's gigantic marble sculpture of David.

This larger-than-life statue looks more like a glorious Greek god than a humble Hebrew shepherd. The fact that the nude figure is uncircumcised has puzzled some people. Surely Michaelangelo knew that King David was circumcised. If he was going to make a nude statue to represent David, why didn't he at least sculpt a circumcised man? Blech and Doliner, authors of *The Sistine Secrets*, offer two possible reasons. The first reason they suggest is that Michaelangelo had perhaps never seen a circumcised man and didn't know what one looked like. This sounds like a pretty lame theory. Michaelangelo studied anatomy. Even if Michaelangelo didn't know what a circumcised man looked like, he could have paid a Jew to show him. The second reason Blech and Doliner suggest is that the Inquisition was persecuting “Judaizers” at the time, and Michaelangelo did not want to risk being accused of Judaizing. Maybe, but this seems like a rather remote possibility. A more likely explanation is that Michaelangelo wanted to celebrate man in his uncircumcised pagan glory, just as other Renaissance artists were doing. Why he chose to call the statue *David* is still puzzling.

It is interesting that while Rome was using the Inquisition to root out Judaizers and keep Christianity and Judaism separate, in Florence things were happening to bring Christianity and Judaism closer together. Jews had previously been banned from living or working in Florence, but when the wealthy de Medici family rose to power, Cosimo de Medici brought the Jews into Florence. Many Roman Catholics in Florence including young Michaelangelo became interested in studying Hebrew, Torah, Talmud, and the Jewish mystical teachings called Kabbalah. According to Roberto G. Salvadori, author of *The Jews in Florence*, “The vivacity and variety of Jewish cultural manifestations in many Italian cities in the 15th and 16th centuries reached their apex in Florence” and the Florentines “were strongly attracted to Judaism.”¹

So Florence became a philo-Semitic city. Even painters and sculptors studied Jewish texts. According to a series on art history, the artwork of this time was affected not only by the revival of Greek and Roman mythology, but also by “the hermetic and esoteric traditions derived from the Jewish Kabbalah.”² It is significant that “the biggest private library of Kabbalistic materials gathered in one place anywhere” was owned by Pico della Mirandola, one of Michaelangelo's teachers.³ Another of Michaelangelo's teachers, Marsilio Ficino, studied Hebrew with Jews and quoted from Jewish commentators such as Rashi, Maimonides, and others.

So Michaelangelo was influenced by teachers who were saturated with Jewish knowledge, and by the Greco-Roman humanism of the Renaissance. But there was another powerful influence that came into young Michaelangelo's life, an influence far more powerful. That influence was the preaching of the Dominican monk Girolamo Savonarola.

Savonarola arrived in Florence when Michaelangelo was around sixteen years old. Savonarola was a fiery prophet who has been called a forerunner of the Protestant Reformation. He preached against the sins of both clergy and laity and called for reform in the

Church. When he arrived in Florence, he preached against sin and brought revival. While the Renaissance was bringing a revival of paganism into Florence under the leadership of Lorenzo de Medici, God was bringing a revival of holiness through the preaching of Savonarola. Author Robert Mears compares these two opposing revivals in Florence to the twins that struggled together in Rebekah's womb, a picture of the struggle between the flesh and the spirit: "There in the womb of Florence, not yet differentiated clearly, but already struggling with each other were a renewed paganism and a renewed Christianity ... The first and older of these twin movements was the pagan Renaissance. The second was the Christian reformation."⁴

Savonarola's preaching brought many to repentance. The gambling houses and houses of prostitution were empty for lack of business, while the churches were full. People made restitution to those they had cheated. The rich gave generously to the poor.

There was revival among children and youth as well as among adults. "In the Easter parade in 1495, the youth companies marched through the city. Among them, walking under the blue and silver banner of St. Mary Magdalene, dressed in white, were the ex-prostitutes singing praises to Jesus Christ. Tears streamed down the faces of many of these young women as crowds lining the streets greeted them with applause and acceptance."⁵

There have been many revivals in Church history, but this particular revival was, in the words of one historian, "extraordinary" and "without parallel."⁶ "During that time there was righteousness, peace, and joy in the city. Some called it heaven on earth. For a few years the famous Renaissance city became a city of God, a shining expression of the kingdom of heaven on the earth."⁷ Other historians agree that this revival was unprecedented:

"The transformation in the social and religious life of the people of Florence has led foreign and Italian historians and sociologists of the most diversified schools of thought and confession to declare that Christ's Kingdom, albeit for a short time, was once a tangible reality in the city on the Arno. Nor was it ushered in or enforced by clerical or secular authority. Tens of thousands of Florentines chose to walk the strait and narrow path voluntarily. Throughout Italy and foreign lands, men and women, lay and clerical alike, looked up with great reverence to Savonarola."⁸

Savonarola not only preached repentance and reform, he also prophesied death and destruction with uncanny precision. He saw visions of God's judgment coming upon Rome and Florence. One especially in-

teresting vision was his vision of two crosses. The first cross was a black cross of judgment that arose out of Rome and brought storms, death, and darkness. The second cross, the cross of God's mercy, did not arise from Rome but from Jerusalem. It brought light, flowers, and beautiful music.

Rome did not like Savonarola's visions nor his preaching against the sins of the Vatican. The Pope sent officials to try to bribe Savonarola by offering him a cardinal's hat. "The Pope has no understanding or care for the spiritual issues here," Savonarola told his fellow friars. "He cares nothing for the work of God in this city. It doesn't matter to him whether Florence is saved or damned ... This I tell you, my brothers. I shall have no cardinal's hat. The only hat I shall have is that of a martyr, red in my own blood."⁹

When the Pope ordered Savonarola to stop preaching, Savonarola took an Acts 5:29 approach ("We ought to obey God rather than men") and continued to preach. The Pope had Savonarola excommunicated and ordered his execution. "Even if Savonarola is a saint like John the Baptist, he must die," the Pope said.¹⁰

So Savonarola was hanged over a bonfire in the piazza of Florence. As Savonarola's dead body hung above the flames, the ropes around the wrists burned away. Then due to some nerve reaction (or perhaps by an act of God), Savonarola's right hand jerked upward and the index and middle fingers raised up to make the sign of the blessing that the people had seen him make so many times before. The crowd screamed and sobbed and wailed. (The Roman Catholic Church has since cleared Savonarola of the false charges against him, and there have even been attempts to have him declared a saint.¹¹)

According to Condivi, who was one of Michaelangelo's pupils, Michaelangelo was greatly enthralled and deeply affected by Savonarola, a man of God for whom he "always had great affection."¹² Michaelangelo not only listened to Savonarola's sermons, he also read and reread and pondered a book of Savonarola's written sermons throughout his long life. Decades after Savonarola's death, Michaelangelo said he could still hear the friar's voice. Thus, "Michaelangelo was evidently converted to Christ from the humanist paganism of the Renaissance."¹³ Michaelangelo's painting *The Last Judgment* is said to be "essentially a Savonarolian sermon in color."¹⁴

The Last Judgment is on the wall of the Sistine Chapel in Rome. Michaelangelo is best known, though, for painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. These paintings also show the influence of Savonarola. Author Ross King says that "these turbulent visions of a vengeful God, doomed sinners, and

prophets crying in the wilderness were undoubtedly part of Savonarola's legacy."¹⁵

Michaelangelo's work on the ceiling was affected not only by Savonarola, but also by the artist's fascination with Judaism, Talmud, and Kabbalah. According to Blech and Doliner's recent (2008) book *The Sistine Secrets*, Michaelangelo scattered Jewish, Talmudic, and Kabbalistic symbols on the ceiling in a secret attempt to subtly preach reconciliation between Christianity and Judaism, at a time when the Inquisition was attempting to further separate the two faiths. The subtitle of the book is *Michaelangelo's Forbidden Messages in the Heart of the Vatican*. Blech and Doliner believe that the "major message of his masterpiece" is "the bridge between faiths."¹⁶

The book is well researched (nearly fifty sources are listed in the bibliography), yet it has at least two glaring errors of factual details that I noticed. The authors mention "the Holy Temple of Solomon as described by the prophet Samuel in the Bible."¹⁷ (Samuel died many years before Solomon was even born.) They also write that "Zorobabel, the Jewish king" was "blinded by the Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar."¹⁸ (The blinded Jewish king was Zedekiah; Zorobabel was the governor of Judah after the Jews returned from Babylon.)

The most serious flaw in the book is the authors' portrayal of Savonarola as a crazy, hysterical religious fanatic, and their portrayal of Michaelangelo as a homosexual who was "traumatized" and tormented with guilt because of Savonarola's sermons. Nothing could be further from the truth. It is a matter of historical fact that Michaelangelo loved to hear Savonarola preach, and meditated on his written sermons throughout his life. As for the alleged homosexuality of Michaelangelo, this is a baseless theory that modern-day sodomites have presented as fact. Even secular author Ross King (who considers Savonarola a "fanatic") agrees:

"Michaelangelo's anxieties about sex are sometimes linked to his own perceived homosexuality. Any study of Michaelangelo's sexual preferences is beset, however, by lost or suppressed evidence."¹⁹ If Michaelangelo had indeed been a homosexual, it is highly unlikely that he would have loved Savonarola's sermons, because Savonarola's bitterest enemies in Florence were the "Campagnacci," a gang of militant homosexuals who vandalized the church, disrupted meetings, and tried more than once to murder Savonarola for his condemnation of their wickedness.

"But if Michaelangelo wasn't a homosexual, why did he never marry?" The most likely answer to that question is because he was not exactly good marriage (or even boyfriend!) material: "He didn't get along with others and frequently burned with jeal-

ousy, foul moods, and disdain for others. He wore old clothes which he seldom changed, and he never bathed. Though rich, he lived as a miser. He ate whatever he found, sometimes only crumbs, and he slept in his raiment and boots. He hated small talk and preferred being alone."²⁰

There is historical evidence that Michaelangelo may have once loved a young lady, but no evidence that he "ever consummated a love for anyone, male or female."²¹ Michaelangelo's attitude toward sex was expressed in this advice that he gave to one of his students: "If you want to prolong your life, practice it not at all, or the least that you can."²² Michaelangelo lived to be 89 years old without any symptoms of the sexually-transmitted diseases which were rampant in Florence. If Michaelangelo ever did feel any sexual attraction to men, he apparently denied that fleshly urge and practiced abstinence.

In spite of Blech and Doliner's portrayal of Savonarola and Michaelangelo as the twisted fanatic and the traumatized "faggot," the book presents some very interesting information which suggests that Michaelangelo may indeed have secretly incorporated Talmudic and Kabbalistic ideas into his work on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Some of the authors' speculations seem a bit far-fetched, but others seem plausible.

Michaelangelo did not really want to do the ceiling when Pope Julius II first asked him to do it. Michaelangelo was a sculptor and did not consider himself a painter. Nonetheless, with increasing pressure from the Pope, he reluctantly took on the monumental task of painting the ceiling.

The Pope's original idea was to have a series of paired panels to show parallels in the lives of Moses and Jesus. "It was meant to illustrate successionism [a.k.a. replacement theology] to the world," Slech and Doliner declare, "proving that the Church was the one true inheritor of monotheism by replacing Judaism."²³ Instead, Michaelangelo painted only people and events from the Old Testament. There is not a single New Testament person portrayed on the ceiling. This in itself was unusual, because during "the previous two centuries, Italian artists had concentrated mainly on New Testament subjects."²⁴

Perhaps the most widely-recognized picture on the ceiling is Michaelangelo's portrayal of God imparting life to Adam by the touch of His finger. Why is God touching Adam's left hand instead of his right? According to Jewish tradition, the authors tell us, blessings and benedictions are received through the left hand, which is closer to the heart. (This is apparently the reason red string bracelets are worn on the left

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Three New Commandments

Part III — In Everything Give Thanks



By Bryant Buck

In the two previous articles in this series I noted that the Ten Commandments are the basis of Yahweh's laws and that they are an eternal standard for righteous behavior. Plus, I observed that Yahweh has more commandments than just ten and that three of these commandments can particularly help us towards a more victorious life.

Three new commandments of particular benefit to believers in Christ are found in 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18: "Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (NAS). In the two previous articles in this series we considered the first two of these commandments. In this third article we shall address the commandment "In everything give thanks."

Many people — in fact, even some Christians — have declared that this command is ridiculous. Surely God doesn't want us to give thanks for wars, murders, rapes, and burglaries; surely He doesn't want us to give thanks for poverty and misery. The problem here is a misreading of the commandment. Yahweh's Word doesn't admonish "For everything give thanks." Rather, it exhorts, "In everything give thanks." There is a big difference between "for" and "in."

You don't have to give thanks for wars ... murders, rapes, and burglaries; you don't have to give thanks for poverty and misery. But if you are in a war or in poverty, you still need to thank Yahweh for all of His goodness in the midst of your unpleasant circumstances. If you have already formed the habit of always rejoicing (keeping the first new commandment), then you will find it easier to give thanks in every circumstance. Once again the choice is clear: Either you give thanks and obey Yahweh's Word or you don't give thanks and you disobey Yahweh's Word.

We live in one of the most prosperous nations in the world. We have more stuff than most people ever dreamed of. With few exceptions we have roofs over our heads, clothes on our backs, and food on our tables, not to mention cars, TV's, video games, cell phones, etc. And yet we are for the most part unthankful. Why? What is the matter with us? Nothing will produce a more effective witness to an unthank-

ful, ungrateful generation than for those of us who know the Lord to give thanks when everyone else is murmuring and complaining. We may be in the world, but because of Yeshua we are not of the world. There is nothing that will draw this distinction quicker than us giving thanks no matter what else is going on around us.

I often hear Christians say, "I'm not sure what God's will is for my life." Really?

"In everything give thanks; FOR THIS IS GOD'S WILL FOR YOU in Christ Jesus." Giving thanks is more than a commandment; it's God's will for you! While you're searching out God's will for your life, give thanks. Then you will be in His will while you're finding out His will! To put this another way, when you're giving thanks, you're always in Yahweh's will — always!

When the Pilgrims set foot on the shores of Massachusetts, they had no roof over their heads, very few clothes on their backs, and very little food to eat. They could have bemoaned their difficult state, but they didn't. Instead, they gave thanks to the Almighty in everything — in spite of what they lacked. We still celebrate Thanksgiving in remembrance of the God-fearing attitude that they brought with them to America. But from the third new commandment we learn that Thanksgiving isn't just a holiday we observe once a year. Thanksgiving is a way of life; we need to give thanks every day.

"Rejoice always; pray without ceasing; in everything give thanks, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 NAS). Obey these three new commandments and you will not only dramatically change your own life towards the image of Yeshua Messiah, but you will have an impact on the lives of those around you. An unhappy, complaining, bitter world is waiting to see the power of our Lord's commands. REJOICE ALWAYS! PRAY WITHOUT CEASING! IN EVERYTHING GIVE THANKS! Let them see the difference.

*Bryant Buck is assistant minister of New Beginnings Church near Rock City, Illinois, and is the author of the currently selling book **The Prayer Warrior**.*

Glastonbury Pilgrimage

by Rev. Terril Littrell, Ph.D.



In 1993 my wife Chloe and I were in England for six weeks. While at Bramhope we traveled two days a week for sightseeing expeditions which were both educational and inspiring.

However, the most exciting trip for me was to Glastonbury. I had read a lot about this fascinating place in church history, and the stories associated with it. There we found an abundance of historical information confirming the entire story of Joseph of Arimathea bringing the boy Jesus with him to a site near the present town of Glastonbury on the southwest coast of England in Somerset. My ancestors were also from Somerset and this made the visit doubly interesting.

The name of Joseph of Arimathea is well known in Cornwall and Somerset, and the traditions linking him with those countries are far too strong and persistent to be ignored.

The origins of the Cornish tin trade are indeed fascinating to trace, and it is interesting to observe that long before the Christian gospel was established by Joseph, his association with these islands and the old industry of the tin workers was known and recorded. S. Baring Gould informs us: "Joseph of Arimathea came in a boat to Cornwall and brought the child Jesus with him, who taught Him how to extract the tin and purge it of its wolfram. When tin is flashed the tinner shouts: 'Joseph was in the tin trade.' "

Tradition has it that Joseph made his fortune as a merchant. We know that there was an extensive trade between the eastern Mediterranean and both Gaul and Britain where tin and lead were mined in the southwest peninsula. Remember that Britain was not incorporated into the Roman empire until the middle of the first century A.D. It is therefore quite reasonable to believe that Joseph traded with the inhabitants of southwest Britain, and that he could have brought his great nephew with him in those "hidden years" between the ages of 12 and 30. A good case has been made by the Rev. C. C. Dodson, an Anglican clergyman, for the notion "that our Lord may have even spent some time in Glastonbury preparing for his mission."

Another writer records this interesting statement: "There is scarcely a spot in Cornwall where tin is at present found that has not been worked over by the 'old man,' as the ancient miners are always called..."



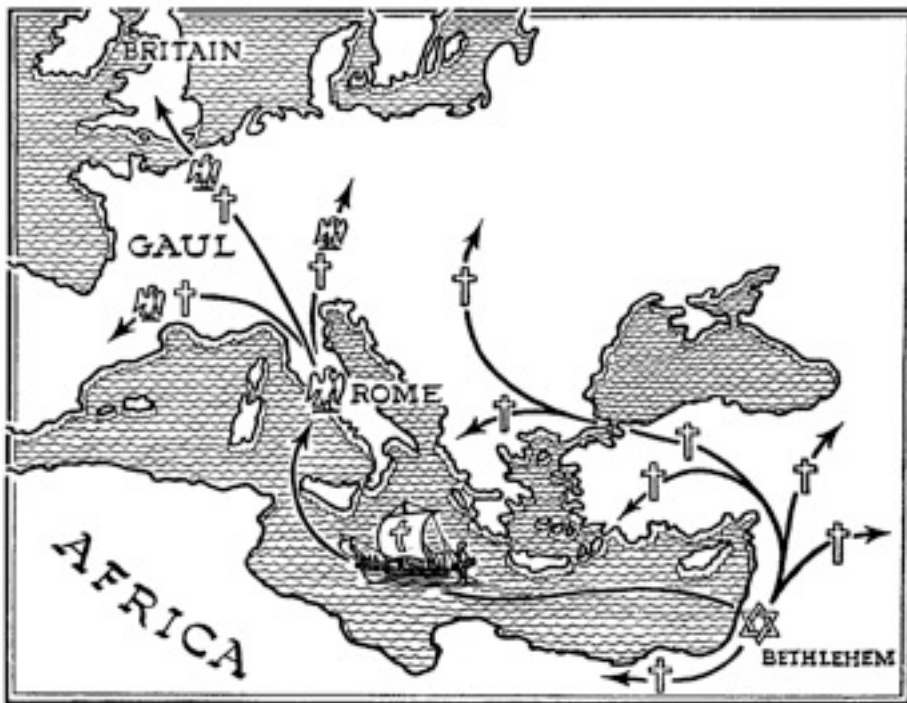
Ruins of the Glastonbury Abbey, which cover the original mud and wattle church built by Joseph and his followers. (Source: iStockPhoto.com.)

Upon whatever spot the old miner has worked there we are told the Phoenician has been or the Jew had mined. The existence of the terms 'Jews' houses,' 'Jews' Tin,' 'Jews' leavings,' 'a tall Saracen,' prove the connection of these strangers with the Cornish mines." In explanation of the foregoing, it should be pointed out that the Jews appear to have called themselves, or were called by the Britons of Cornwall, "Saracens."

Early Christian tradition

Soon after the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, a great persecution broke out in Jerusalem. Stephen was martyred, James was beheaded, Peter was imprisoned, and the saints were scattered abroad. Joseph of Arimathea was forced to leave Palestine, but he did not travel alone. According to tradition, with him went Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Joseph and his little band of missionaries would undoubtedly have traveled the old familiar tin trader route that Joseph had traveled earlier.

A deputation of the Druids waited upon Joseph asking him to bring the Gospel to their land. Joseph gladly consented, and landed on the Isle of Avalon. There he built a little tabernacle of mud and wattle which became the first Christian Church, more properly the first messianic synagogue, outside of Jerusalem. The site of this building was later covered by the Glastonbury Abbey. This early messianic community attended Sabbath synagogue service based on prayer,



ish Sanhedrin, the highest court of justice and the supreme council at Jerusalem, consisting of 71 priests and laymen. He did not assent to the council's condemnation of Jesus. He was one of the few men who dared to speak in defense of the Christ when he was brought before Annas and Caiaphas.

None wanted to forget him because he was an essential part of the life of Jesus—a faithful follower and a powerful man in his own right. He was a disciple of Jesus, “but secretly, for fear of the Jews.” He overcame his fear on the day of the crucifixion in order to ask Pilate for our Lord's body. Assisted by Nicodemus (the man who had gone to visit Jesus by night), he took the body of

scripture reading, and instruction (sermon) in preparation for baptism of the unconfirmed. This was called the liturgy of the Word, and was followed by the liturgy of the table for the celebration of the love feast, which was derived from ancient temple worship.

Holy Grail and Staff

The cup or chalice in which Jesus consecrated the wine of the Last Supper of the Passover is called the Holy Grail. Joseph of Arimathea brought this to England with him. It was this cup that he used to celebrate the first Christian Holy Communion in Glastonbury. Joseph kept this earthen vessel in his care, and just before he died, he placed it in the Glastonbury well to be covered with water and eventually return to the earth from which it came.

Joseph also placed his staff in the ground, and it grew into a thorn bush which blooms today twice a year, in the spring and in winter. The Queen of England is sent clippings of this bush each time of blooming.

Joseph of Arimathea is mentioned by all four Gospel writers: Matthew 27:57–60; Mark 15:43; Luke 23:50–53; and John 19:38.

Saint Mark describes Joseph of Arimathea, translated from the Greek, as “honourable” in the authorized version of the Bible. Mark's Greek word means something like “a true gentleman,” but it also came to be used to mean “well-off,” and Matthew paraphrases Mark's word in that sense: “a rich man.”

Other information about Joseph of Arimathea given in the four Gospels: he was a “counselor,” probably meaning that he was a member of the Jew-

Jesus from the cross and laid it in his own, unused tomb.

After Christ's crucifixion the need to bury his body immediately was evident. It was the Sabbath, the holy day of the Jews. And with their leader killed, his followers, those first Christians, were not anxious to draw attention to their relationship with Him, so afraid were they of the Roman authorities and the Jewish leaders who saw Jesus as an enemy of their powerful positions.



The reputed crypt of Joseph of Arimathea. The crypt was excavated after the Chapel of St. Mary was built.

So it fell to one of the most powerful and brave of his followers to obtain Jesus' body for burial. Joseph of Arimathea like many Jews had purchased a tomb just outside the holy city of Jerusalem near the Valley of Kidron to be on hand when the Messiah came—a pious custom among the Jews who wished to be among the first to welcome the Messiah when he called the holy ones from their graves. So Joseph obtained the body from the Roman officials and offered his own nearby tomb for Christ's body.

Pious tradition has it that Joseph was Mary's uncle. Under Roman and Jewish law only a close relative could be responsible for burying a criminal; otherwise, the bodies were buried in a special common graveyard. It was a similar law which enabled early martyrs in Rome to be buried in the catacombs.

The Gospel according to Joseph of Arimathea

No one knows for sure what Joseph said in his sermons to the people of Glastonbury, but according to scriptural information that we have as well as tradition, it may have been something like this:

I am Joseph of Arimathea, a devoted follower of Jesus Christ since my youthful years. He was my nephew, the Son of God and the son of Mary, a virgin. I walked with Him along the countryside. I was with Him in Galilee and discovered the growing hatred for Him among the scribes and the Pharisees. I beheld the miracle of his feeding 5,000 hungry people with five barley loaves and two small fish, and the attempt by the multitude to make Him an earthly king.

Now that I am an old man, each day I stand in his employ grows into holy importance and gives me great peace, for he is the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all who believe in Him. My story concerning the crucifixion and the resurrection is a record of events I heard and saw during the years I followed Him.

In the synagogues men earnestly listened to his parables and his teachings. The sick and the blind came to Him and were healed. Little children sat on his knees and gazed into his unforgettable eyes and loved Him with a devotion far beyond their years.

It was a very vexing problem for me to talk with those who followed Jesus only to cause discord among the members of the Sanhedrin. The Sanhedrin was the high court of the Jews, and Caiphaz was the high priest at that time. Pontius Pilate was the governor sent by Rome to rule Palestine. When the time was right, Jesus was called before the Sanhedrin although many of its members believed in Him. But others thought Him an impostor, worthy of severe punishment. The Sanhedrin feared to offend the temporal power of Rome, and this was an ideal situation for those who would destroy Jesus Christ.



The Chalice Well (Source: Webshots.com)

Pilate realized very soon Jesus would be brought before the Roman court and judgment would have to be passed on Him, God's only begotten son. He knew that this procedure would free Caiphaz and the Sanhedrin from any future responsibility, and place a new responsibility on himself and on Rome.

When Jesus was brought to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor asked, "What accusation bring you against this man?" The multitude answered that Jesus was a malefactor; if he were not, he would not have been delivered to the Roman court. Then Pilate ordered them to judge Jesus according to their own laws. The high priest evasively replied that it was unlawful for the Sanhedrin to put any man to death. This power belonged only to Rome.

Pilate entered the judgment hall followed by Jesus. Pilate questioned Him whether He had said that He was born to be a king. Jesus with great candor replied that He was born to be a king so that He might bear witness unto the truth. Then Pilate, disturbed by his answer, and asked, "What is truth?"

Pilate again told the multitude he could find no fault with Jesus and would release Him. This angered them and they demanded that Jesus must be crucified immediately. Pilate knew that according to Roman law, he could not avoid giving Jesus to the multitude which demanded his death. Sorrowfully, he gave Jesus to the Roman

soldiers, hoping that he might restrain them from destroying the Son of God.

The soldiers took Jesus, placed a crown of thorns on his head, and put a purple robe on his body. The multitude shouted, "Crucify Him! Crucify Him! We have no king but Caesar!" Pilate, with great bitterness, said, "Behold the Man! Take Him if you so desire and crucify Him, but I find no fault in Him! Constantly I have told you this!"

Jesus was then led to a place named Golgotha, meaning the place of a skull. Here Jesus was crucified upon a cross and with Him two thieves, one on his right hand, the other on his left. The Scripture which declared, "and he was numbered with transgressors," was now fulfilled.

There were women "looking on afar." Mary, the mother of Jesus; Mary, the wife of Cleophas; Mary Magdalene; Mary, the mother of James and Salome, and many others who "came up from Jerusalem" were there.

The disciples were near the cross in great sorrow. My good friend Nicodemus and I were near them. Nicodemus, early in Christ's ministry, visited Jesus by night and heard Him say: "God so loved the world he gave his only begotten son."

I consulted Nicodemus concerning the body of Jesus now hanging upon the cross. We decided I should find Pontius Pilate and ask him if we might take his body for burial. Pilate, pale and trembling, gave his permission. I departed with an inner feeling that Pilate believed in Jesus, the Christ.

I unfolded a white linen cloth and laid it on the ground. It was close-woven and a little longer than the human frame and twice as wide. It was a shroud. I leaned a ladder on the far side of the cross and climbed it. I drew ropes around the chest, beneath the shoulders of Jesus, and threw the loose ends to my servants. With force, and with sorrow that there must be force, I wrenched the spikes from the crossbar. The body slumped forward against the ropes. I discarded them and stood below the body. "Lower Him," I whispered. By sad degrees, the body of the Lord sank down to me, and I received the torso in my right arm. The head fell back; the hair made a rain at my elbow. Jesus was so light. The body without the sounding breast was pitifully small. I knelt and laid Him on the shroud and began to wind Him for his burial.

Nicodemus prepared a mixture of myrrh and aloes, and placed it on a linen cloth. We wrapped his body therein. I had made a garden and built a sepulcher nearby. Little did I think while building

the sturdy tomb that it would be the burial place of Jesus.

The door to the tomb was a hole in stone no higher than a human waist. I went in backward, on my knees, bearing the shoulders of Jesus. A servant kept his legs from dragging dirt. "Thank you. It is enough," I said. My voice was enormous because of the rock around Him. I disposed the body alone and then emerged. There was a descending groove from the left to the front of the door. I rolled a flat stone down this groove. There was a sound of the grinding of stone in stone. The door was closed. The deed was done. By order from Pilate, soldiers were placed on guard.

After talking with the disciples, Nicodemus and I returned to our distant homes, our hearts heavy from sorrow. But we knew in whom we trusted. Surely, he was the Way, the Truth, and the Life for all who believed in Him.

On the first day of the week very early, I visited the sepulcher near my garden and picked white flowers to place near the large stone that covered the door.

As I drew near, to my great surprise, I met Mary Magdalene in front of an open door. She had come at daybreak with Mary, the mother of Jesus, and discovered that the stone was rolled away. Within the empty sepulcher were two angels clad in white, who asked the women why they were weeping. Before they could reply, an angel said to them, "He is not here! He is risen from the dead! Quickly go your way and tell his disciples that He goes before them into Galilee. There you shall find Him as he said unto you." Christ is risen, he has triumphed over death. He gives all believers life everlasting for He said, "Where I am, there you shall be also. In my father's house are many mansions."

My prayer is that the crucifixion and the resurrection shall create in you a supreme faith for evermore. For this He suffered and was crucified and rose again from the dead.

Christ is risen! He is risen, indeed! Alleluia!

Then Joseph extends the invitation to celebrate Holy Communion from the very same vessel from which Christ and his disciples drank at the Passover, in the same evening in which our Lord was betrayed.

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wrist by some contemporary celebrities, like Madonna, who are into "pop kabbalah.") So that is the reason God touches Adam's left hand, the authors theorize. Maybe. Or maybe it's because Michaelangelo was left-handed. Or maybe the most aesthetic pose resulted in the left hand receiving God's touch.

Some of Blech and Doliner's other observations are more convincing. According to Kabbalistic cosmology, God created the universe through the *s'firah* (divine emanation) of *chochmah*, wisdom. (This is not so far-fetched if one reads the words wisdom speaks in Proverbs 8:22–31.) In Michaelangelo's depiction of God creating Adam, there is a female figure embraced by God's left arm. According to Blech and Dolinger, she represents Sofia, the woman who was the embodiment of wisdom in Greek thought. Some might argue that Michaelangelo would not use a woman to represent God's wisdom. I'm sure some feminists would disagree with this argument. More significantly, though, when wisdom personified speaks in Proverbs 8, wisdom speaks not as a male but as a female. This can be seen by the feminine gender of the word *chochmah* and by the feminine conjugation of the verb "rejoicing" in verse 31.

There is more. When Kabbalah diagrams the ten *s'firot* (divine emanations), they are placed on a grid in such a way that they correspond to different parts of the human body. In Kabbalistic thought, wisdom is linked to the right hemisphere of the brain. In 1975 a Jewish surgeon from Indiana visited the Sistine Chapel and noticed that the oval-like shape around God, with its dangling limbs and pieces of cloth, looked like a perfect cross-section of the right hemisphere of the human brain. Coincidence? Maybe. But Michaelangelo, like other Renaissance artists, was known to dissect human cadavers to study anatomy.

Another widely-recognized picture is that of the Temptation and Fall. The fruit on the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was an apple according to Christian tradition. (The Latin words for "apple" and "evil" share the same *mal-* root. Many English words that start with the *mal-* prefix likewise refer to something evil or bad.) Yet Michaelangelo did not



follow Christian tradition and paint an apple on the Tree of Knowledge; he followed Jewish tradition and painted a fig tree.

The serpent with its coils wrapped around the fig tree has a human face identical to the face of the angel that is banishing Adam and Eve from Paradise. The gestures and body positions of the serpent and the angel mirror each other. (Michaelangelo gave the serpent arms and legs, also in keeping with Jewish tradition.) Blech and Doliner believe that Michaelangelo was using this imagery to portray the rabbinic concept of the *yetzer ha-tov* and the *yetzer ha-ra*, the inclination in man to do good, and the inclination to do evil.

Blech and Doliner believe Michaelangelo also portrayed the struggle between the two inclinations in the three panels of Noah. *The Flood* is on the center panel. *The Sacrifice of Noah*, representing the *yetzer ha-tov*, is on one side, and *The Drunkenness of Noah*, representing the *yetzer hara*, is on the other side. According to the authors, "Michaelangelo is asking us which tendency are we following: our Yetzer ha-Tov or our Yetzer ha-Ra?"²⁵ They also note that Michaelangelo painted Noah's Ark like the Talmud describes it, as a box, rather than as a ship with a curved hull, as many Christian artists have portrayed it.

Blech and Doliner see many details which they believe are veiled insults directed by Michaelangelo toward the Pope and Rome. Aminidab, one of the ancestors of Jesus, has a bright yellow badge sewn on his left sleeve, "the exact badge of shame that the Fourth Lateran Council and the Inquisition had forced on the Jews of Europe." The authors believe that Michaelangelo was "pointing out exactly how the Catholic Church was treating the family of Christ in his day: with hatred and persecution."²⁶

Jeremiah, who prophesied Jerusalem's destruction, is dressed in red and gold, the traditional colors of Rome, the authors say, "to make it clear that he is addressing Rome and not ancient Jerusalem."²⁷ If Michaelangelo indeed meant for *Jeremiah* to be a prophetic warning to Rome, the prophecy was fulfilled fifteen years later when the Protestant Franks sacked Rome, killed thousands, and took all the gold and bronze they could carry—a fate very similar to Jerusalem's in the days of Jeremiah.

Another interesting detail in *Jeremiah* is a barely-noticeable scroll with the word *alef* written in Latin capital letters, followed by the Hebrew letter *ayin*, so it looks like this: ALEF^א. Blech and Doliner believe this is a reference to the Talmudic teaching that says a priest is not fit to serve in God's holy Temple if he cannot distinguish between the pronunciations of the Hebrew letters *alef* and *ayin*. If Michaelangelo had this in mind, perhaps he was using ALEF^א to tell those "in the know" (i.e., those familiar with this Talmudic teaching) that Pope Julius was not fit to be a priest in God's Temple. It is interesting that Michaelangelo placed *Jeremiah* directly above the place where the Pope would sit in all his pomp and splendor when he sat in the Sistine Chapel—which, by the way, was patterned after the dimensions of Solomon's Temple.

Blech and Doliner see other possible veiled insults to Pope Julius in his painting of Zechariah, a prophet who saw the high priest "clothed in filthy garments" (Zech. 3:3). Zechariah is wearing the Pope's family colors and has the face of Pope Julius. Another similar possible veiled insult is seen in the species of tree painted in *Jonah*. According to rabbinic tradition, this particular tree produces an oil that was unfit for use in the Temple—perhaps suggesting that Julius was unfit to serve in the Church, the authors say.



Of all the things Blech and Dolinger point out, the most interesting to me is the shapes of significant Hebrew letters that are suggested by the positions of certain figures, and the relationships of those letters and their meanings to the events that are portrayed. In David's slaying of Goliath, the positions of the two male figures form the Hebrew letter *gimel* (ג). In Kabbalistic teaching, *gimel* stands for *g'vurah* ("strength"; also associated with *din*, "judgment"). *G'vurah* represents the judgmental male force in the universe, which must be balanced by *chesed*, "mercy," the nurturing female force in the universe. The initial letter of *chesed*, *chet* (ח), can be seen in the two female figures in *Judith*. The rear hem of the yellow dress of Judith's handmaid is darkened and effectively cropped out, accentuating the shape of the *chet*. Kabbalah sees *g'vurah* on the left and *chased* on the right. The two panels are positioned that way when viewed from the end of the chapel where the public entered in Michaelangelo's day. The placement of *g'vurah* on the left and *chased* on the right can also be seen in *The Last Judgment* on the wall. The souls being damned are on the left, and the souls being saved are on the right, in accordance with both Kabbalah and Matthew 25:33.

Blech and Doliner also see a Hebrew letter suggested in the *Jonah* panel. They point out that Jonah is the only prophet with bare legs, so our attention is

drawn to his legs, which form the letter *hei* (ה). *Hei* is the fifth letter of the Hebrew alphabet and has the numerical value of five. Five, of course, refers to the five books of the Torah. The angel in the upper right is holding up five fingers, and the angel below him is staring directly at Jonah's *hei*-shaped legs. Furthermore, Blach and Doliner also see Jonah's left hand contorted into the shape of the letter *beit* (ב), the very first letter in the Torah, which in Genesis 1:1 is always written double-sized in all hand-written Torah scrolls. Through all these veiled references to the Torah, the authors believe that "Michaelangelo is sending a message to the Vatican that a *Church that ignores its roots in the Torah and the primacy of the Hebrew Scriptures will be lost.*"²⁸ Further emphasis on the Torah can be seen in the *fact* that on the central part of the ceiling, the "trunk" of the tree, Michaelangelo portrayed the first two Torah portions of the annual Jewish reading cycle.

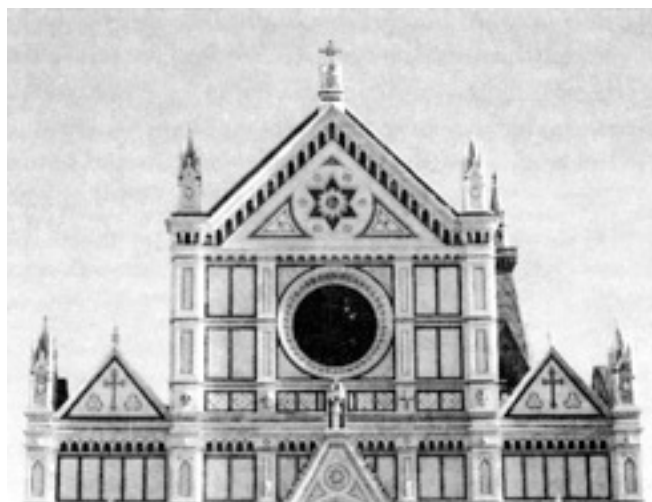
Jonah was the last panel Michaelangelo painted and is the largest and most impressive of all the figures. It's very possible that Michaelangelo identified with Jonah. Jonah was a reluctant prophet, forced to go to Nineveh when he would have preferred to stay home. Michaelangelo was a reluctant painter, forced to go to Rome when he would have preferred to stay in Florence and sculpt. Jonah sulked after he finished his mission; so did Michaelangelo. Jonah was the one prophet sent to preach to Gentiles; Michaelangelo, by his painting, preached to Gentile Christians about their Hebrew roots.

Michaelangelo's name is a combination of *Michael* and *angelo*, "angel." In Daniel 12:1 Michael is the angel who stands up for the Jewish people. If there is any truth to Slech and Doliner's speculations, then it appears that Michaelangelo had a very fitting name, because like the angel Michael, he "stood up" for the Jewish people.

"I work out of love for God and I put all my hope in Him," Michaelangelo wrote.²⁹ He died at 89 years of age and was buried in Rome. The citizens of Florence felt insulted that he was not buried in the city he loved, so they stole his body and buried it in Florence in the Basilica of Santa Croce. About 300 years later the Basilica got a new facade, designed by a Jewish architect, Nicolo Matas. Matas placed a large Star of David over the front door. "Today," Blech and Dolinger write, "the church that houses the tomb of the most famous secret supporter of Talmud and Kabbalah bears a giant Jewish star."³⁰

NOTES

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2. Matilde Battistini, *Losapevi dell'arte* (book series under direction of Stefano Zuffi) *Simboli e allegorie prima parte* (Mondadori Ejecta, 2002), 6.



3. Benjamin Blech & Roy Dolinger, *The Sistine Secrets* (Harper & Collins, 2008), 70.
4. Robert W. Mears, *The Last Revival* (New Hampshire: Prophetic Services, 2000), 185.
5. *Ibid.*, 204.
6. G.F. Young, *The Medici* (New York: Random House, 1933), 250.
7. Mears, 206.
8. Pierre Van Passen, *A Crown of Fire: The Life and Times of Girolamo Savonarola* (New York: Scribners' Sons, 1960), 182.
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10. *Ibid.*, 301.
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14. Van Passen, 235.
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18. *Ibid.*, 1501.
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20. Robert J. Morgan, *On This Day* (Nashville: Nelson Publishers, 1997), March 6.
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23. Blech & Dolinger, 19.
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28. *Ibid.*, 228.
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30. *Ibid.*, 288.

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Westby: Continued from page 4.

in a variety of ways. Aristotle wrote, "To be beautiful, a living creature, and every whole made up of parts, must not only present a certain order in its arrangement of parts, but also be of a certain definite magnitude. Beauty is a matter of size and order...."

Thomas Aquinas said that the beautiful object is one that has unity, proportion, and clarity. Beauty can be variously defined, but it usually includes harmony, intrinsic excellence or perfection, coherence, and certain properties that make it admirable and/or enjoyable.

There is beauty to be found in many forms: a spectacular sunset, a mother nursing her baby, leaves falling in October and November, a mathematical formula, wisdom, a generous and kind spirit, the sounds of frogs croaking by the still pond on a warm summer night. There is a beauty of things, beauty of events, beauty of design, and beauty of character and spirit. There is also a beauty to be discovered in time...holy time.

The Sabbath is a creation of God quite unlike the material creation in that it is a non-material thing, *time*, always moving, never static. Its beauty cannot be *seen* in the typical way objects are beheld. Like the material creation, however, it has its own unique, marvelous, and mysterious beauty about it.

The Sabbath must be experienced according to its Intelligent Design to be fully appreciated. This invisible beauty is *seen* through experiencing its designed purpose. Much as the beauty of far away galaxies can be accessed only through the light-gathering power of great telescopes; the beauty is always there but remains unseen unless accessed by telescope, or in the case of the Sabbath, by entering into its time to be refreshed by its Creator.

The beauty of the Sabbath is the special kind of goodness it enshrines. The seventh day memorializes two of Yahweh's greatest and most beautiful actions—actions that are given titles by which we know him: Creator (see the Exodus 20 version of the Sabbath commandment) and Savior (or Deliverer, see the Deuteronomy 5 version of the Sabbath commandment).

The Sabbath memorializes Yahweh's creation of the cosmos and his giving it life, including making man and woman in his image; it memorializes his love for his children by saving them from slavery and giving them freedom, food, and a new life in a new land. The Sabbath contains in its very design these two powerful insights into just who God is. He is life-giver and life-saver.

So why does Yahweh God want us to treat Sabbath time differently from the other six days? It is precisely to remember, to consider, and to internalize this beautiful yet critical knowledge about who He is and what He has done—knowledge that can impart meaning and purpose to our lives lived in relationship to our Creator and each other.

A Portal to View and Partake in Holiness

James D. Tabor, biblical scholar and author of the intriguing book, *Restoring Abrahamic Faith*¹, writes:

"The Sabbath Day is vitally connected to knowing and understanding God as Creator and experiencing His Presence, as well as providing essential physical and spiritual rejuvenation to our busy lives. Our loss of this vital pillar of the Faith has probably contributed more to our disconnection from the people of Israel, and thus to the Hebraic roots of Biblical Faith, than any other single factor.

"The very fact that the Sabbath commandment is one of these great Ten 'Matters' of YHVH [Yahweh] clearly sets it apart as a major component of the Way of YHVH. It would not be included as part of this great Code, this awesome Testimony of YHVH Himself, unless it was an indispensable part of God's Way for humankind. Two of the Ten are stated in positive forms: Remember the Sabbath and Honor your father and your mother; the remaining eight are prohibitions. These two positive commandments are linked together in Leviticus 19:2-3 as an introduction to the description of true Holiness. Notice:

You shall be holy, for I YHVH your God am holy. Every one of you shall revere his mother and his father, and you shall keep My Sabbaths: I am the YHVH your God.

"One is the foundation of God's relationship with humans, the other the foundation of human relationships with one another."

Jesus repeated this passage from Leviticus in his moving Sermon on the Mount: "Therefore you are to be perfect [holy], as your heavenly Father is perfect [holy] (Matthew 5:48).

The fourth commandment tells man to "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy..." (Exodus 20:8); "Observe the Sabbath day, to keep it holy..." (Deuteronomy 5:12). Is this not a clear echo of the creation event where at the pinnacle we read: "And God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating he had done" (Genesis 2:3).

We are to become holy because our God is holy. We are by design to mature spiritually into his holy

image. We are to remember and observe (lit. guard) the Sabbath as holy time because God who is holy set it apart as holy time by his word and actions.

Is there a wardrobe door, a portal, that mankind has ignored and failed to open, a portal to knowledge—priceless knowledge—about how man can come to know about God and become holy as he is holy? God is not hiding this knowledge but bids us “come and learn of me.” He also knows life is busy and people need to take a weekly stop from their busyness, to cease from their normal uses of time, and to enter into a period of special-use time, time best spent learning how to live before the Holy Father.

God, Time, and the Seventh Day

The Sabbath is a chunk of time, and time cannot be saved, stored, or bought. It just comes, freely, and in the same amount and at the same speed for everyone. God lives within time. He acts in historic time. There was a time when creation came into being, when man was created, when Moses met God on the mountain, when Jesus died and rose to life. God shares time with us.

Of course, our experience of time differs from God’s in that our time runs out and we die. In that sense time is both precious to us and our “enemy.” We live the life of the dash between the two dates on our tombstone.

For God time is simply his ongoing, never-ending life. All cosmological and human events are but markers and measurements against the eternity of God’s never-ending life. His life is what makes time.

Eternity is time
Time, eternity
To see the two as opposites
Is Man’s perversity
(*The Book of Angelus Silesius*)²

The ancient pagan philosophers had ideas about God and time, some of which unfortunately took root in Christian traditions and ideas of God. Saint Augustine was influenced by Plato’s and Aristotle’s concepts of a transcendent God. Augustine reasoned that time was part of the physical creation and hence the Creator must remain untainted by the material and be firmly placed outside of the stream of time—a timeless Deity. Thomas Aquinas combined the Greek methods of rational philosophy with Christianity and concluded with Plato that God inhabited a realm beyond space and time. This removed God from man’s world to some far away remote “heaven.”

Clearly, according to the Bible, God is not timeless but is a God of historical actions in the same time and space shared with mankind. The first thing God declared “holy” was a period of time to

which he later gave a name: “Sabbath day” (the only day given a name, others were just numbered). “Sabbath” literally means “to stop,” the idea being that one should cease (Heb. *shabbat*) normal activity. This is what God himself did in time and space when he ceased his creating and rested at a certain geographical space and fellow-shipped in time with the man and woman he had made in his image.

Time is like the eternal burning bush out of which Yahweh spoke to Moses.³ Though the bush burned with fire, it was not consumed. Though each instant must vanish to open the way to the next one, time itself is not consumed...it continues.⁴

The history of Scripture is that of God sharing his life (time) and doing his mighty deeds in his/our world. It is man’s history and part of the history of God’s life. He is not a God far off, but a God nearby. He is a God still willing and ready to share his life and plans with those made in his image—you and me.

More Than a Doctrine

For many Christian Sabbatharians and for observant Jews, the Sabbath sits prominent on the table of chief doctrines. And it should, for God has so made it. Doctrines are descriptive teaching from Scripture, and some are weightier than others. The Sabbath isn’t the weightiest, but its importance is reflected by its position in the middle of the Ten Commandments (The importance of the Sabbath can also be seen by the fact that almost a third of all the words in the Ten Commands are devoted to it).

It is all too easy for us religious folk to stake out our doctrinal positions like boundary stakes pounded into the corners of our property. It is our biblical GPS position, important to our identity, and part of the list of hard cold facts comprising our religious profile. But doctrines should serve to be more than information, facts, and biblical proof texts.

If they are true teaching, they have their origin in the very character and mind of God. They contain spiritual instruction and knowledge designed to move us in the Way of God—to love God with all our mind, heart, and strength, and to love our neighbors as ourselves. This is the path of true holiness, of internalizing the Divine Nature, and manifesting outward the loving fruits of that nature.

Look at doctrine, the Sabbath doctrine, as a structure that contains something that holds a substance. Picture a glass of milk. The structure is the glass; the substance is the milk. Both are important, but the object of the glass is to hold the milk. The milk contained therein is the purpose of the glass.

The seventh day is a 24-hour period that comes every seven days. There are few stipulations on its

use beyond the change in focus from normal work to remembering the mighty works of Yahweh. It is a rest, a ceasing, a door into a God-centered use of time. That is the general structure of the Sabbath Day. But what is its substance?

The Sabbath is more than a doctrine to which we give our assent. It must be a personal reality that we enter. We must experience the Sabbath to taste its substance, to drink its refreshing milk. There is a learning curve toward experiencing the Sabbath more fully. The substance is resting in the Presence of God—coming to know God and His Way. “It is about meeting God in a “sanctuary in time,” a day created to serve much the same function that the Jerusalem Temple did before it was destroyed in 70 A.D.”⁵

One can begin celebrating the Sabbath any week. You can begin this week by making provision for its arrival. Do some planning. Make it special. Make it the crown of the week as Yahweh did at creation. Plan a special meal with candles ready to light, do a walk in the country, relax with some beautiful music, take a nap, meditate, visit a lonely friend, attend a church, study that topic you planned to look into “someday.” The fifty-two Sabbaths in the coming year will provide plenty of opportunities for refreshment, worship, prayer, learning, and service.

Dr. Laura Schlessinger found the transition from work time to rest time difficult. After experiencing a conversion to Judaism the internationally famous talk show counselor determined to enter into the world of “Sabbath time.” She writes:

“I remember all too painfully my struggle with Sabbath observance. The first several Saturdays I just stayed in bed, depressed and upset. I couldn’t imagine what I would do with the whole day if I didn’t work on my writing, go shopping, watch our son do some competitive sport, turn on some television, etc. I realized that our lives were very focused on ‘doing stuff.’

“We were always together as a family for each meal.... What we were lacking was a spiritual focus. Slowly, I weaned myself away from worldly frenetic activities to attend services, to read Torah and other religious writings, to pray and to contemplate and to relax (another task with which I had little experience). Given my nature to be diligently productive, it was a struggle to give up the sense of being busy, in control, and in charge. I discovered the blessings of returning it all back over to God and godly pursuits in a more pious sense.

“At first, I discovered the joy of being able to stop working, and because it was commanded by God, I didn’t have guilt about some downtime. That was psychologically liberating for me (there’s that freedom-from-slavery concept again). Next

was the long road toward a deepening spirituality—with time set aside solely for that endeavor. I’m still learning, and I’m not nearly good enough at it. I still struggle with letting go of workweek frustrations, annoyances, and the like, but observing the Sabbath has changed me from being a gerbil on an exercise wheel to a human being aspiring to ‘walk in God’s ways.’ ”⁶

Dr. Laura’s book, *The Ten Commandments—The Significance of God’s Laws in Everyday Life*, contains a lengthy and deeply insightful chapter devoted to the Sabbath. The book is worth buying for this chapter alone.

It Is All about God

The Sabbath is about God. It points to the reality of an active, creating, saving Deity. The Sabbath bids man, for whom the day was made, to STOP! LOOK! and LISTEN! Pause from work, look heavenward to see God arrayed in glorious beauty, and listen to his Torah, his instructions on how to live.

Seen at its broadest scope, the Sabbath pictures our pilgrimage to the ultimate rest of God’s Kingdom. It pictures our freedom from slavery, whether that imposed by men (Egyptian), imposed by our own sins, or by our mortal flesh doomed to decay and death. “There remains then, a Sabbath rest for the people of God” (Heb. 4:9).

We are invited to enter God’s “rest” to share the life of God. The Sabbath is God’s gift to man to be entered and enjoyed. The resurrection to eternal life is in fact the portal into entering the never-ending Kingdom of God—the enduring Sabbath of rest and peace for the children of God. It is this Kingdom that Jesus calls us to “seek first.”

As the Sabbath is symbolic of the coming Kingdom of God—that time of world peace, lion and lamb lying down together, a millennial rest from all evils, etc.—it is a vision of a future reality. It is a futuristic vision that is fantastic and beyond anything seen in history.

The prophetic Sabbath contains a fantasy-like world the prophets of old describe—a future world almost beyond conception. Paul quotes Isaiah in his discussion of the glorious future that awaits us:

No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him—but God has revealed it to us by his Spirit (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

Are you curious about what the millennial Sabbath will be like? Can celebrating the weekly Sabbath give us a taste of what the Millennial Sabbath holds? I think so.

One picture Scripture presents of the Sabbatical Kingdom of God is that of a grand banquet, “a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines” (Isa. 25:6). This side of the Kingdom, God’s people are encouraged to have “love feasts” as regular celebrations in their walk Godward. These meals can be and are for many a highlight of Sabbath enjoyment.

Do you remember the warm and satisfying feelings you savored following a pleasantly wonderful family meal? Maybe it was at a holiday or at a reunion or a weekly Sabbath fellowship meal. The spiritual refreshment of acceptance, belonging, laughter, shared love and loyalty lingers long after the feast is over. These little feasts are but tasty *hors d’oeuvres* of what the Kingdom will bring for all peoples to enjoy.

Enter the Wardrobe

Open the door and move into time prepared for you. The Sabbath isn’t just another doctrine to be added to a statement of faith, not just another piece of room furniture. It is the *Wardrobe*, a God-given portal to peer into His future, and to enjoy His Presence as we rest from our labors.

Challenge yourself, your family, and your friends to enjoy God’s gift of the seventh-day Sabbath. Enter the portal to share God’s cycle and rhythm of life. He bids us, “enter my rest.”

END NOTES

1. Tabor, James D., *Restoring Abrahamic Faith*, Genesis 2000, 2124 Crown Center Drive, Suite 200, Charlotte, NC 28227, Genesis2000.org, 2008, pp. 44-45.
2. *Angelus Silesius* (meaning Silesian messenger) is the pseudonym that 17th century poet Johann Scheffler used for his writings, rhymes, and poems. He was the son of a Polish noble and German mother, served as a court physician for German rulers, in 1661 became a Catholic priest.
3. Exodus 3:2
4. Heschel, Abraham Joshua, *The Sabbath*, Harper Collins, 1951, p.100.
5. Klinghoffer, David, *Shattered Tablets – Why We Ignore the Ten Commandments at our Peril*, Doubleday, 2007, p. 98.
6. Schlessinger, Dr. Laura and Rabbi Stewart Vogel, *The Ten Commandments—The significance of God’s Laws in Everyday Life*, Cliff Street Books, 1998, pp.107-108.

Ken Westby is the founder and director of The Association for Christian Development (ACD) and is a director emeritus of the BSA. The ACD Web site is located at www.godward.org.

Will Texas Face Court Challenges to the New Science Standards?

by Donald M

Now that the moaning and hand-wringing are over, there’s talk of mounting some legal challenges to the new science standards in Texas. At issue aren’t the standards themselves, but the personal motivations of some of the Board members who advocated for these standards.

Now the issue is whether there is enough *prima facie* evidence to challenge the Constitutionality of the wording now, or wait for the textbook review process in two years.

“They have shown clear religious motivations that certainly raise some questions,” Quinn said. “But if the board requires phony religious arguments in the science textbooks, I can’t imagine somebody won’t challenge it.” Publishers may end up producing a textbook for Texas and other conservative states and a separate version for other states—because under the new guidelines, a Texas textbook “will be poison in states that value education,” [Dan Quinn, a spokesman for the Texas Freedom Network].

I guess Quinn isn’t bothered at all by the motivations of atheists or philosophical naturalists who want to teach students that no matter how complex and specified biological systems might appear, the design is only apparent and not actual because nature possesses all the creative power to produce it through chance and/or necessity. If Quinn is really concerned about motivations, he ought to check the philosophical and worldview motivations of those who want to promote naturalism as science in science classrooms. He has nary a peep about any of that.

So here’s a few questions for Mr. Quinn and anyone else sweating bullets over the “religious” motivations of those who question the way science is taught in public school classrooms: What does a worldview free science classroom look like? How do you successfully divorce science from any and all philosophical underpinnings? And if you can’t do that, how do you decide which philosophical considerations are necessary for science and which aren’t?

While we’re on the subject of motivations, perhaps Mr. Quinn might take note that William Wilberforce fought for over 20 years in the early 1800’s to end the slave trade in England motivated almost entirely by his “religion” (Christianity). Should England have repealed the anti-slave trade act because of those “religious” motivations? Or can we only call motivations into question when it involves how we teach science? If so, Mr. Quinn, what’s your specific criteria for determining those motivations and deciding that no matter how good the standards might be, if they were inspired by the “wrong” motivations, we just can’t let them stand.

(Source: *Uncommon Descent Blog*, <http://www.uncommondescent.com>)

Editorial: "Secularism," continued from page 3.

science and secular government never offer anything of lasting value to the person who is hanging to life by a thread.

One of the themes that I have been on in recent editorials in *The Sabbath Sentinel* is that our decline in religious practice in our Western countries is an opportunity for us to step into the breach and offer a hand to those who are struggling with their lives and have no church or religion to turn to. We who keep the Sabbath as our sacred day of worship have a unique perspective on man's relationship with God that is not found in common Christian practice. I do not for one minute believe that we are superior in any way to others who count Christ as their Savior, but I do believe that we have a much more biblical and practical view of who God is and how we should live in his presence.

Recently one of my sons asked me how to witness to people, how to show them our faith in Christ. Without thinking about it, I told my son that one of the best ways to witness was simply to listen to people speak of their personal troubles and concerns and to offer to pray with them or pray for them. This is something that I have learned from my wife. She is very good at knowing when to ask people whether they want her to pray for them. Most people believe that there is a God out there somewhere and that He may have some interest in their personal lives. Even though as a society we are losing our connection to our Creator, most people on an individual level who have been brought up in this culture have an innate sense that God is there and that there are some people out there who are close to Him.

A secular society is one in which people are easily alienated from each other. We as Christians need to make sure that we stay connected with each other and with our church families. When people lose that common thread of morality and values that a secular society brings, they are more inclined to distrust each other. We as Christians have a common thread of morality and values. This comes from our having the same book of instruction, the Bible, and this same living Spirit that teaches us that we are all one in Christ. Secularization rips people away from those moorings. We have the answers to our neighbors' disconnectedness and their desire to be close to people who are genuinely concerned for their personal well-being. Just being available in another person's moment of need is in itself a powerful witness.

With the Internet and other forms of modern electronic communication, we have more opportunities today than at any time in history to stay connected with other people. Yet sometimes we allow our elec-

tronics to take the place of a face-to-face conversation. I certainly believe that we should take advantage of every modern form of communication to reach out to people, to give them comfort, to give them encouragement. But, we should never forget that there is nothing better than a sit-down, face-to-face conversation with someone.

The Gospel is about a kingdom, but it is also about a personal relationship with the Ruler of that kingdom. We as Christians have an opportunity to reach across the chasm of alienation brought on by our increasing secularization. It is up to each of us to increase our commitment to bring more people into God's kingdom, and the very best way to do that is to stay personally connected with friends, family, and neighbors so that we can be there in their moment of need.

— *Kenneth Ryland*

News

The special counsel to the Alliance Defense Fund is outraged over a Vermont state bill he says effectively legalizes production of child porn.

Vermont Senate Bill 125 will make "sexting" legal for teens ages 13 to 18. Sexting refers to the sending of nude photographs via cell phone — a growing phenomenon among teenagers. Some teens who have been caught sexting have faced penalties ranging from expulsion from school, to child pornography charges, to having to register as sex offenders.

But some Vermont lawmakers think the punishments handed down have been too severe, so they are now working to make sexting legal in the Green Mountain State for consenting teens. Pat Trueman is with the Alliance Defense Fund.

Text Shock "This is an outrage," says Trueman bluntly. "It's the only state in the union ever to consider legalizing the production of child pornography."

He is concerned that, if passed, Senate Bill 125 could be misleading. "So even if Vermont legalizes the production of child pornography by sexting, those same kids who think they're safe can be prosecuted by the federal government," the attorney points out.

Trueman says dropping the penalties currently associated with teen sexting will only serve as an encouragement to engage in the practice. "The law is a great teacher," he shares. "And if you crack down on a few of these kids, the rest will stop sexting."

The attorney also warns that individuals might not realize that once a "sext" message is sent, the image can wind up on the Internet and be circulated for an indefinite period of time.

(*Pete Chagnon - OneNewsNow.com - 4/15/2009*)

Sometimes I need to remind myself:

What the Sabbath Means to Me

By Julia Benson

It really is not a day of “I can’t.”

1. Sorry, I can’t work today. (Yippee!)
2. Don’t feel like fighting the crowds at Wal-Mart? No problem!
3. Housework to do? Pahleeeaaase!
4. Got a problem? Just let it go.

It is a day of “ahhh...I can!”

1. I can relax!
2. I can spend time with my family!
3. I can take a break from stress and pressure!
4. I can enjoy life!
5. I can do something good for someone else!
6. I can spend time with other believers in worship and prayer! YESSSSSS!

There is too much time spent not enjoying life. At least I know there is one day each week reserved to do that. That is so precious to me.

Then he said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath” (Mark 2:27, 28).

Oh, dear friends, family, acquaintances, oh, and myself, who sometimes just don’t get it, God is so, so good to us... if only we would listen to Him.

“If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the LORD’s day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the LORD, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob.” The mouth of the Lord has spoken it (Isaiah 58:13,14).

I want to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of my father Jacob. Ahhh...the Sabbath...yes.

Julia Benson is a freelance writer who lives in a small town in southeast Minnesota. A former school teacher, Julia has a husband and a young daughter. She attends a United Church of God congregation in La Crosse, Wisconsin.

Sabbath Morning Companion

The Art of Not Knowing a Lot

When I moved first to Missouri, I encountered a different personality type. For lack of a suitable term, I have come to call it “self-effacing wisdom.” A person with self-effacing wisdom would say something like this: “I don’t know a whole lot about these things and I’m not the brightest bulb on the string, but it just seems to me ...”, and then out of his mouth comes a profundity that knocks you over with insight.

In a small group Bible Study recently, I experienced the wisdom of a couple who are the self-effacing wisdom types. Their names are Gary and Sandy.

Gary and I needle each other as frequently as possible and he usually gets the best of me, but that’s okay because his wife usually gets the best of him.

In the Bible study Gary told the story of his recent haircut, administered rather laboriously by Sandy. “She was working on my hair, and I hear her say, ‘Oops!’ Then she had to take off more to fix it, and she said ‘Oops!’ again. Then she had to go over to the other side to even it out, and then she says, “Oops!” over there. When she got done I was surprised I had any hair left at all.”

Sandy felt she needed to speak up. “You know the difference between a bad haircut and a good haircut, don’t you? It’s about seven days.”

Remember – this conversation took place in a Bible Study, the context of which related to bad things that happen. The point my two friends were making? It might look like God is giving a bad haircut, but just give these things some time and they will all work out in the end. He knows what he is doing even if we don’t, and he has no need to say, “Oops!”

That’s very much what Paul meant when he said, “We know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose” (Romans 8:28 KJV).

He also wrote, “And not only that, but we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Romans 5:3-4 NKJV).

Worried about stuff? Going through some hard times and don’t know why? Remember who is in charge. The bad haircut will look good in just a few days.

—Lenny Cacchio

*Lenny Cacchio lives in Lees Summit, Missouri. **The Sabbath Morning Companion** is now available as a devotional and journal through the Website of the Church of God, Kansas City (www.kccog.org/literature.htm). Also, see Lenny’s blog at <http://morningcompanion.blogspot.com/>.*

The Church in the World

KENYA: Church Struggling after Islamists Destroy Church

Six months after attack, Muslim assailants still at large; weary congregation faces heat, rain.

GARISSA, Kenya, March 5 (Compass Direct News) – Six months after a gang of Muslim youths ruined a church building in this town in northern Kenya, Christians still worshipping in the sweltering heat of the open air say they feel disillusioned that officials have done nothing to punish the culprits or restore their structure.

On a sunny afternoon last Sept. 14, when angry Muslim youths threw more than 400 members of the Redeemed Gospel Church out of their church building, the Christians hoped they would be able to return to the ruins of their former structure. That hope is quickly giving way to anger, hopelessness and despair.

“After six months in the open, the church feels tired and cheated,” said pastor David Matolo. “We are fed up with the empty promises from the government administration.”

He said the church, which began worshipping in Garissa in early 2001 with only a dozen members, is fast shrinking.

“Our church membership has decreased, which is of great concern to me,” he told Compass. “The church thinks that the government has decided to buy time – almost every month I do book appointments with the relevant authorities, who on several occasions have given us a deaf ear.”

Since the attack, church members have been meeting at the town show grounds. Just a few miles from the Somali border. The site has few trees to protect the congregation from the scorching sun, with temperatures ranging from 92 to 104 degrees F (30 to 40 degrees C).

Asked why he thought government officials were reluctant to grant the church a permanent place of worship as promised, an irritated Matolo did not hesitate to reply.

“The administration has decided, ‘kutesa [inflict pain on us],’ always making promises that never come to pass,” he said. “At times the provincial commissioner deliberately decides not to take my phone calls. I have had a painful experience.”

Matolo said he has asked the administration either to allow the church to build a new structure on land lying idle near a police training college or to let them return to their original site. “We are ready for any eventuality,” he said. “We feel that the administration is not concerned about our spiritual welfare.”

Asked about the pastor’s complaints, provincial police officer Stephen Chelimo told Compass, “The issue at the moment is not within my docket, but wholly rests upon the provincial commissioner.”

But Provincial Commissioner Stephen Maingi said the onus rested on the district commissioner. “Let the district commissioner sort this issue with the pastor,” Maingi said.

District Commissioner Onyango Ogango, in turn, indicated the church itself was the source of problems.

Radical Islamic Influence

Tensions between Christians and the Muslim-majority population in the semi-desert town of 20,000 people began in June 2007, when Muslims built a mosque too close to the church building – only three meters separated the two structures.

Matolo said pleas to District Commissioner Ogango did nothing to reverse the encroachment of Muslim worshippers.

Land issues alone have not been responsible for tensions in the area. The Rev. Ibrahim Kamwaro, chairman of the Pastors’ Fellowship in Garissa, said Matolo had offended Muslims when he preached to a lame Muslim man. Muslims were said to be upset that the pastor persuaded the disabled man to stop going to the mosque and instead join his church.

Christians feel increasingly hunted and haunted as the spread of Islamic extremism is fast gaining ground in this town, located about 400 kilometers (249 miles) from Nairobi, the capital. In neighboring Somalia, newly elected President Sharif Sheikh Ahmed on Feb. 28 offered the introduction of sharia (Islamic law) in exchange for a truce with a rebel extremist group said to have ties to al Qaeda, al Shabaab; the rebels said they would keep fighting. Many fear that Muslim youths in this lawless part of Kenya will be tempted to adopt the radical, uncompromising posture of the fighters.

Garissa has more than 15 Christian denominations.

Notices and Advertisements

GOOD NEWS FOR TODAY

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By Marjorie Gray

Illustrations by Dave Fulwiler

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Prayer Request

Dr. Terril Littrell, a regular contributor to *The Sabbath Sentinel*, is requesting prayer for his cancer. Here are his words from a recent e-mail he sent to us:

"Would you please make an appeal for prayer for me in the Sabbath Sentinel? Besides being a diabetic and my resistance to invasion is low, I am now fighting cancer. I have six months of chemo treatments to receive beginning in March."

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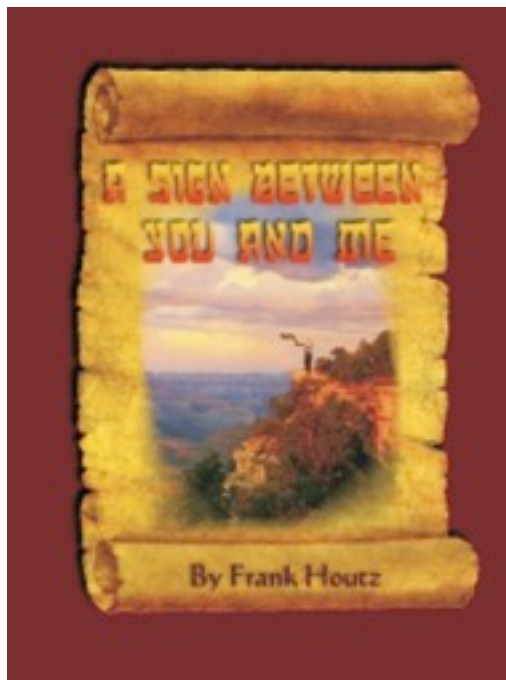
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A Sign Between You and Me (second edition)

by Frank Houtz

This book is a comprehensive study of the Sabbath including both weekly and high Sabbaths. It is intended to help those new to the Sabbath to become grounded in their new found delight. Often after one discovers the Sabbath he is inundated with arguments against what he is doing. The second edition addresses more arguments than the original version and gives historical evidence as well as scriptural evidence to back a conviction that the Sabbath is for all who delight in the Lord.

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