

"Eternal Rendezvous"



"Remember The Sabbath Day!"

MAN'S GREAT TEST OF OBEDIENCE



Let us follow a dialogue that took place in the pioneer days of Seventh-day Adventism in Northern Europe. One of the interlocutors was a Norwegian-American minister, Elder O.J. Olsen (who died just a few years ago), instrumental in a revival of an old-fashioned, Sabbath-keeping form of Christianity in the Vestmann Islands, as well as in other parts of Iceland. The other speaker we introduce was the captain of an Icelandic steamer on which Mr. Olsen was traveling. This captain had just informed the minister that he did not see what difference there could be, to a modern Christian, between keeping the seventh-day Sabbath of the "Jewish" tradition and keeping any other day of the week. This observation caused the minister to make a little excursion, with a view to clarifying the issue. He asked the captain a simple question.

"Do you have any fire emergency system on board this ship?"

"Certainly."

"Then you probably also have regular exercises to test the equipment and to train the crew for such an emergency?"

"Of course."

"Now, suppose that one week you, as a captain, announce the following: 'On Tuesday night at 8 o'clock all members of our fire brigade are requested to attend a meeting, on the lower deck, for an important drill.' Well, Tuesday night arrives. The ship clock strikes eight. You are there. But, sad to say, not one single crew member turns up. A slip of paper has been left on your desk by one of the men, stating that this happens to be his bridge game night. For fire emergency drills he definitely prefers Fridays. Another man is reported to have expressed some days ago, in the company of some companions, that he has always adhered to the principle that drill meetings should take place on the first evening of the week. A third has hinted that Wednesday nights would be a good time.

"Now, Captain, what is your feeling about this? Don't you think they may all be right, each one in his own way, considering the matter from his individual point of view? In fact, is not a Wednesday just as good for that meeting as a Tuesday?"

"No, Pastor Olsen, not if I have announced Tuesday. For then I mean Tuesday, not Wednesday or Friday."

"Well, but frankly speaking, was not your choice of Tuesday somewhat capricious perhaps, after all? You could equally well have chosen another day, couldn't you?"

"Maybe, but one day had to be chosen, and someone had to choose it. Now I do happen to be the captain of this ship. I have been appointed as its responsible leader. So the crew member who simply chooses Friday after I have decided Tuesday, must have assumed a dreadful responsibility of his own. And I should think his choice of Friday is bound to be capricious in a far more serious sense than my choice of Tuesday. To me this is simply an audacious overthrow of my whole authority. It is stubborn rebellion against an established order. It is mutiny. . ."

The captain was manifestly working himself up into a mood of righteous indignation that was becoming louder and louder in its spontaneous expression. You might almost imagine that that "mutiny" had already taken place in factual reality on board this very ship, so peacefully sailing on its way between Iceland and Norway one beautiful summer day sometime in the twenties.

Then he suddenly became silent. They were both silent for some seconds. The captain finally looked up with a smile. It was the smile of one who has had the experience of some weird recognition. He was just coming back to the reality of this present moment, this present world.

"Aha, I see the matter we were just arguing about in a strangely different light now. So this is what you were driving at, Pastor Olsen? Of course, you are right. The Sabbath is simply a question of obedience. It is a matter of submitting unreservedly, unquestioningly to God. It is a matter of humbly accepting His right to command. It is a matter of believing implicitly that He is a Person who says something, and means what He says.

"He is the literal Captain of my literal life, He is a literal Person, ordering things in a literal way, in this literal world of mine. He must also be a loving Person. Theoretical rules do not love anybody. But he loves me, right here in my everyday bustle and busyness. He personally cares about what I do, and He pleadingly invites me to come to a literal appointment, an urgent appointment, with Him, the Lord of the universe. But I simply ignore that appointment. I turn up on another day, a day of my own choosing. I am either an obstinate crank or a man who has failed to believe -- to believe that my Lord and Maker is literally there."

Our attitude toward the Sabbath, I am afraid, gives a measure of the narrowness of our vision regarding what Christ has done for us. Just imagine: the Creator Himself, the Majesty of Heaven, has found it sufficiently urgent and worthwhile, nay absolutely indispensable, to make an emergency descent to one particular creature of His, on a tiny planet called Earth, to save him from misery and death. In fact, already before there was any problem emerging on Earth, he had come down. His urgent desire was to have a relationship of sanctification with us; that is the most intimate union known between the Creator and the created ones, the only safe protection from the fall into sin. So He communicates to man the exact time of the holy rendezvous He wants to have with him. Now, would it be reasonable to think that this whole complex of contingent planning, and fulfillment of plans, would tend to make the Sabbath commandment less binding than the other nine to the creaturely person for whom it was expressly devised?



Could you imagine a bride saying about her bridegroom: "He told me to meet him at such and such a time, in such and such a place, and I promised to come. But now I do not know what to think about all this. If only I could know for sure whether that appointment is really morally binding upon me! What troubles me about it is the fact that

it has been made so terribly specific. True, that boy has done everything in his power to make me happy. And I know how happy he will be to see me at the appointed time. But, honestly, why should he indicate that specific time and that specific place? I just cannot bear such specificity. Why cannot things be kept in a more general setting? Of course I do want to be married. But why must it necessarily be at a definite time and in a definite place? Such fixedness is not quite fair to the scope of freedom which a young girl should have. There is something so peremptory and narrow minded about it. I just am not going to be tied by these shackles. It intrudes upon personal freedom. Do not misunderstand me. I am not against appointments as such. It is the "time element" and the "place element" I cannot take. I am obviously not made for such hairsplitting accuracy, such standing upon trifles. What I am longing for is something more ideal, more spiritual, something enshrouded in the mysteries of a freely floating dream. To tell the truth, I am afraid I shall have to find another bridegroom. This one is evidently not my type. He is too practical and intrusively personal. He is too much bound up in this-worldly specificities!"

I should confess at once, I have never heard a girl in love express herself in such terms. Nor do I expect to experience anything as perverse as that in the future. But what now about our "Christian" world and its relationship to a personal God, the God who created man and placed a day of holy communion immediately in front of Him: The Sabbath was man's first new day; let us not forget that.

...It is incredible that any one could succumb to patterns of reasoning as hollow and as piteously unpromising as that.

Here I feel the urge to close my ears for a while to the weird voice of the "bride", and listen exclusively to the voice of the Bridegroom, the great Lover, the Man of matchless charms.

This does not mean that I intend to "leave in the lurch" every sober knowledge I possess about the Sabbath as a morally binding commandment.

No, I shall all the time keep in my ears that authoritatively ringing voice, rolling like thunder from the sanctuary of God's throne. That sanctuary and that divine throne are realities I do not, either, dare to reduce, disrespectfully, to mere abstractions. That center of God's judgment throne is a shaking reality whose concrete reverberations cannot be escaped by any human being.

Deepest down, however, the Sabbath is a touch-stone, testing the very foundation of man's loyalty to God; that is, his love for God. Still this is not the utmost end of its capacity. The Sabbath is designed to be more than a test for man, namely a test for God Himself. For in one way, God is the main One, in this drama of the ages, who is being tested. He permits an entire world to put to the test His justice, His faithfulness and His love. And the Sabbath is again the supreme testing ground. From the beginning, the Sabbath was the capital body of evidence testifying to God's attitude of

extreme benevolence toward His creatures. So it is not a fit of sentimental nonsense when I choose, as my next headline, the following-

GOD'S LOVE LETTER TO MAN

Well, what do we mean when we say that God decided to meet man on the Sabbath day? Are we justified in qualifying the Sabbath commandment as a unique "rendezvous"? The term "a sanctuary in time" is certainly a most exacting one. Is there any realistic indication that the fourth commandment may be the only one in the decalogue where such an extraordinary encounter between God and man could be perfectly proper, perfectly practicable?

In this connection, let us consider what M.L. Andreasen states in his book: *The Sabbath, Which Day and Why* (1942).

"Breaking the fourth commandment is not like breaking some of the other commandments."

Andreasen's idea corroborates what we have arrived at in a previous chapter. The Sabbath is essentially different, somehow, Breaking it, is not, for that reason, a less serious matter or a less remarkable sign. Rather the opposite: a man may commit manslaughter in a fit of anger; he may, as a result of sheer rashness, take God's name in vain; or he may succumb to the temptation, suddenly presenting itself, to yield to some overwhelming sensual passion. But a failure to keep the Sabbath, according to Andreasen, rarely comes into that category. Sabbath-breaking does not have the excuse of sudden passion or of inordinate desire. It is not like most other great sins or destructive habits:

"It is rather a symptom of spiritual decline, of departure from God, of estrangement from the promise, of a sickly Christian experience." (Ibid. pp. 26-27).

The long and the short of it is: Sabbath-breaking is apostasy. In other words, it is a deep-rooted, long-term thing, a disorder of the chronic type, not the acute, transitory type. I sometimes try to express the seriousness of it by simply calling the Sabbath a "heart affair". It is all a matter of the most tender vows of faithfulness ever known to any marriage covenant.

But, you may eagerly object, what about the individual who today knows nothing--or next to nothing--about any such thing as a Sabbath

in this world? Can he, with any degree of fairness, be branded as an "apostate"?

No, you are right there, in one sense. On the other hand, even in this case the statement about deep-seated apostasy is perfectly valid. In the history of this world

there is the indisputable fact of a collective apostasy. As a race we are guilty, heartbreaking guilty, of having "let God down". And Sabbath-unfaithfulness is one of the conspicuous symptoms of our wicked dereliction.

I have contended that the Sabbath embodies, as it were, God's determination to cast His lot with man, wholly and fully. Now, is there any specific evidence that, in the Sabbath commandment, God joins man in a unique way? That is exactly what Andreasen suggests in the following passage.

"The Sabbath command is the only commandment in the observance of which God could join man. It would be highly improper to speak of God as keeping the first commandment: 'Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.' So it is with the second and the third. Again it would be highly irreverent to speak of God as keeping the last six commandments. A moment's reflection will make this clear. Stealing, lying, adultery, all these have no place with reference to God. But there is one commandment in the observance of which God could join man: the Sabbath commandment. Man can keep it; God can keep it. Thus the Sabbath is the meeting place of God and man." (Ibid. p. 32).

So the uniqueness of the fourth commandment is a mystery indisputably asserting itself. And it is a uniqueness asserting itself precisely in what I have called God's "coming down". If He had not come all the way down, man's predicament would have had no solution. In the New Testament that total condescension on God's part is further revealed in his "coming in the flesh". The incarnation doctrine is the essence of New Testament theology. A denial of that doctrine is equated with "non-Christianity". This is the "spirit of the `anti-Christ'". ...you know exactly how distant that spiritualism (or spiritualizing away of all concrete reality) is from the Spirit of realism, the Spirit of God, the Spirit of the truth.

"Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God. And this is that spirit of anti-Christ, whereof ye have heard that it should come, and even now already is it in the world." I John 4:2,3.

Spiritualizing away the concrete reality of God's coming all the way down, this is the sham spirituality the great adversary has chosen to reduce God's plan of salvation to naught. Prophetic revelation also describes it as the mystery of iniquity, or the mystery of lawlessness.

"For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming: Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders. And with all deceivableness and unrighteousness in them that perish, because they received not the love of the truth that they might be save." 2 Thess. 2:7-10.

It is the denial of the bodily "coming down" of a personal God, that encourages man in his natural inclination toward lawlessness. At the same time this is a denial of God's love for man in the radical sense of His "coming down" as the extremely Humble One. It is interesting to see that this divine humility is qualified as the "mystery of godliness": God was "manifest in the flesh" (1 Tim 3:16). This is, of course, in all respects the diametrical opposite of the spirit of the "man of sin", "the son of perdition:, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God" (2 Thess. 2:3,4). Titanism and super-man pride is the essence of the "mystery of iniquity" (lawlessness), the "lying wonders" of vain spiritualism, cited above.

...The Sabbath commandment, taken in its entirety (and that is, of course, the way all real things should be taken), constitutes a striking "coming together" of two things one seldom thinks of as fitting together, namely the common and the holy. These are both embraced by the very text of the commandment. For notice that it does not only say: Keep the Sabbath holy. No, it continues by pointing out what should fill the first six days: "Six days shalt thou work." So it commands man to do and refrain from doing. Neither part is looked upon as unworthy of being mentioned in the holy text of the fourth commandment. Again the Christian Agape reveals itself as fundamentally different from the pagan Eros. God's philosophy considers as fully respectable the common thing that the philosophy of spiritualism tends to shrink back from as something despicable (bodies, concrete matter, practical everyday affairs).

Pagan thought here reveals one of its logical fallacies. And when I say "logical fallacy", you should not think that it is a negligible thing in the world of the spirit. The evil one prepares his most fateful deceptions by tricks of fallacious logic. Example: by totally abolishing in man's world the realm of the "common" or the "profane", the idea of the "holy" is simply made impossible. Its whole frame of reference, as it were, is suddenly torn to pieces. For here the "common", of course, is the very setting in which the "holy" finds itself engrained. ...We have pointed this out as a logical self-evidence already: to "hallow" is to "set apart as holy". But how can you set something apart if there is not another thing from which it is set apart? How can you distinguish holy time, if you have no common time from which you distinguish it? Pan-sabbatism is the shrewd idea of making all days holy. In its historic appearance and its diabolical effects, we shall show it to be parallel to the machination of pan-theism, the desperate absurdity of making "all things God". Every bit of matter in the universe is proclaimed divine. End result: nothing is God. Nothing matters anymore! This is Satan's supreme device of hocus pocus designed to do away with the Holy One, the holy ones.

Again the tremendous reality of creation, woven inextricably into the very text of the Sabbath commandment, is the basic notion making the whole difference. Paganism has no idea that God created. The Bible only knows the astonishing God who went down. Went down to what? To the most lowly things. He is the incomparable God of the lowly ones. And this plan of lowliness is the extreme working out of His love. The eternally Wise One, who has molded true philosophy in every detail, has actually given an infinite prestige to "downness" in this sense. There is nothing improper or anti-ideal in an intelligent creature's inherent unsightliness, even his total helplessness, without God.

He should only know the fact that he is unsightly and helpless. That is an integral part of his realism. The gospel calls that realism the "love of the truth". It is the realization that dependence on God is the creature's normal position. It is a great position. God-dependence is the basic creaturely virtue. It is decisive for the Creator's own attitude toward the creature, the attitude of benevolence and grace: "God resisteth the proud and giveth grace to the humble" (I Peter 5:5). The opportunity to see someone else above oneself, to seek "another's wealth" (I Cor. 10:24), the better honor of the other one, this is looked upon as a joy, the thing one loves to do. No wonder that Biblical realism is called the love of the truth. The emotions, as well as the intellect, is here fully involved.

Conclusion: The Sabbath commandment puts the things in their right places. It gives wisdom to distinguish between the great and the greater, between the common and the holy. Such wisdom is without bias, without pride and vanity. It is realistic.

As God intervened in man's life and destiny by introducing His first Sabbath, there was no trace of anything arbitrary in this...That is, the sense of "despotic" or frigidly "automatic", or fatefully "irrevocable". It was not in this inhuman sense God suddenly "took a fancy" to man, and made him His particularly selected one. No, it was with an undertone of trembling tenderness--and a remarkable delicacy of respect for the created person's own autonomy and moral freedom. This is, in fact, the most delicate appeal imaginable, on the part of a Creator, to His beloved creature, not to leave out of the account of his life the Sabbath day. I have dared to try and make a paraphrase of what I personally feel God is here saying to Man:

Dear Man:

Let me confide a secret to you, a tender urge from the depth of my fatherly heart. Your life is an essential part of my happiness. You will never realize to the full how dearly I love you. That was the reason why, from the beginning, I longed to appoint a most special rendezvous with you. Every seventh day my soul was filled with joyful expectancy at the thought of meeting with you in quite a special way. This was in order to show you, my special friend, that I, the great Yahweh, am also the loving Emmanuel, the Father who cannot bear being separated from His child. That is also why I am the God who interferes, interferes quite specifically and personally in the deepest life of my human creature.

So do understand this, my dear child: anything less than that special rendezvous would leave me an unhappy Father. For, behold, I am not at all that vague and misty shadow of a God portrayed by the wily pseudo-spiritualities of this world, more merciless and cruel than any Moloch worship. The meanest calumny ever launched against me by the arch-deceiver is this "advanced" idea that I am just an impersonal "power" in nature.

I assure you, dear child, of mine, I am not at all the type of 'Creator' evolved pagans will qualify as a mere 'principle of evolution', the barren abstraction to which proud and self-

sufficient scientist and philosophers have reduced me. I am not that divine Super-Automaton, a God in the abstract, just aimlessly turning his heavy wheel of routine laws-laws exactly like their `divine author'; that is, `as blind as a mole and as unfeeling as a mill stone', entirely deaf to the individual cries of individual men with their individual heartaches.

On the contrary, no sooner was there an inarticulate cry from your lips, or the most secret sorrow in your heart, than my compassion went out to you from the aching depths of my own heart. Why was it that so few came to hear that undertone of tenderness in my voice, as it echoes forth between the ravines of the wilderness of antiquity, declaring that I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; that is, the God who never tires of seeking to find and save the individuals, the rare ones that still care to be found and saved. My compassionate cry through my disciple John is a call for you, quite individually, to come to my Sabbath rest: `Behold I stand at the door and knock; if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me!"



THE SABBATH COMMANDMENT--A CALL TO MERCY

But frankly, you say, how can we be so sure that it is, on the contrary, the attitude of tender mercy God proclaims as His sacred principle and His peremptory order to us in the fourth commandment?

In order to make sure about that, it may be useful to go to other Bible texts. We find a parallel one in the 23rd chapter of Exodus. I do not say that it is necessary to do that. Intelligent and unbiased readers may not need that at all. I myself needed it. Of course, I ought not to assume that you are as unintelligent and as prone to bias as I am. But here I shall quote that other text for you anyway. The first part of it will not impress any one as different at all from the text of the 20th chapter:

"Six days thou shalt work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest." (Margin: "keep the Sabbath") Exodus 23:12.

And now further: For what purpose should man rest? Notice the reason here given to that cattle-raising people, those lowly herdsmen, elected by God to be His peculiar property: "that thine ox and thine ass may have rest."

That is brilliantly clear, isn't it? Man is required to give practical expression to a spirit of considerateness and mercy toward his "other ones". To what level of other ones? The down-most level; that is, as men are known to evaluate "up" and "down".

So we have had the matter pointed out to us in terms we cannot misunderstand, however dumb we may be, however deaf in our spiritual hearing. Those "hard" words about "thy son" and "thy daughter", "thy manservant" and "thy maidservant", etc. in the Sabbath commandment, as God put it all down with His own finger, cannot be regarded as hard any longer--I mean "hard" to the minds of ordinary common sense people. I am not yet speaking about the minds of certain theologians. But true theology is the "science about God", isn't it? And now, what does the essence of this text really tell us about the essence of God?

What a remarkable God! The God of the lowly ones! And what an unexpected hard nut suddenly dropping down from the highest branch of the peaceful palm tree and right upon the skull of the modern theologian. Pagan idealists of all ages and all climes--and particularly the proud humanists of our modern Occidental world--would tend to turn away with amazement and disgust, from such divine lowliness. This is unique in the annals of the formation of religions in any part of the world. Think of it: a God who, right in His most solemn statements of sacred legislation, utters words of merciful concern for dumb creatures, like donkeys and cows!

In fact, worshipers of the traditional gods in antiquity would think it an unworthy and unforgivable sentimentality, on the part of gods, to worry about the everyday lot of even human beings. Particularly those men of ancient societies who happened to have the good fortune, themselves, to be free men, would think it infinitely far below their personal dignity to pay any serious attention to the fate of such people whom our present text (Ex 23:12) qualifies as "the son of thy handmaid", and "the sojourner". What have we to worry about the destiny of slaves and barbarians?

And do not think, now, that that motley troop of Hebrews, with whom the Lord had to deal in the desert, and later, were so much different from the "pagans" around them in this respect. Their social reaction was very much the same. In their natural hearts they had no compassion with the "lower orders". So most of them undoubtedly felt rather scandalized when suddenly placed face to face with a formulation like this one:

"Six days thou shalt do thy work, and on the seventh day thou shalt rest: that thine ox and thy ass may rest, and the son of thy handmaid, and the stranger may be refreshed." (Exodus 23:12).

What strange interests on the part of a God! Hardly a single one of the nations whom the Israelites met on their way, and were influenced by, was seriously disturbed in their ethical conscience by such thoughts about mercy toward bondmen and strangers.

Here Old Testament theology already was found to mean a revolution, a total transvaluation of values in the contemporary world. And we modern men think we have

made a tremendous progress in social ethics. Yet our theologians, right in a so-called Christian environment, seem to be taken by surprise whenever they face the fact of God's merciful concern about creatures as far down in the valley of pain and suffering as the animals! The fact that God suddenly begins to talk about duties of mercifulness toward them--and this even in the solemn context of the moral law--that comes as something like a shock upon us.

What is wrong with the animals then, as our culture looks upon things? What makes them so unworthy? It is their lack of intelligence, we are told. Who cares about a "dumb beast"? Apparently, whatever is "not intelligent" is "no good". Intelligence is the measuring standard for all prestige.

How could a beast have any mercy shown to it, in such a pitiless environment? How could a creature that dares to walk around with an intelligence quotient as close to the bottom line as that, expect to have any attention paid to it at all in such a pitiless intellectualistic culture as ours?

We sometimes seem to think that the reason why God came down to us--and found it worthwhile to save us--was that we were so admirably intelligent. But why did he really come down to us? It was because we were the most miserable, the most pitiable and unhappy creatures in the universe. Without God we were absolutely helpless. Therefore-- and for no other reason--did the Merciful One come down. He simply took pity on us. This is one meaning of the Sabbath, and not the least important.

The Loud Cry in a Way You Hardly Thought of it:

The prophetic literature of the Bible repeatedly mention a certain "Loud Cry" and a "voice" exceedingly "loud". When I look at the history of the Sabbath I have the nagging feeling that, as the people of God, we have been sadly insufficient in our collective pilgrimage down through the ages. How distressingly low-voiced we have all been. For is it not through a miserable treachery on our part--we who have posed as the servants and trumpet-blowers of God--that the vindication of God's cause, tended to turn into a scarcely audible whisper in our throats?

On God's part there was a dramatic and urgent proclamation of the Sabbath message from the beginning. Where creation is the very setting, drama and urgency are self-evident. And when the law was announced in its fulness on Sinai, we know that it was to the accompaniment of an orchestra so dramatic that the people could hardly bear it:

"And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking, and when the people saw it, they removed and stood afar off. And they said to Moses `Speak thou with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die'". (Ex. 20:18,19).

Why did God speak so loud and so dramatically? It was because He simply could not stand the unrighteousness of mercilessness! For the Loud Cry, you see, is originally a cry for mercy. Were you quite aware of that simple fact?

Please read the "loud cry" as formulated by Isaiah in his 58th chapter. Read it thoughtfully and ruefully from beginning to end, and you will know why the prophet was requested to cry so loud. You will know also exactly what transformation has to take place--in you and me--before the great day of the Lord. This chapter is one great commandment of mercy, and it is as loud, even thundering, as any human prophet could make it. From the first verse we know what it is about:

:1 Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins.

And the name of that sin is mercilessness--mercilessness of the most hideous kind, under the cloak of "mercy" and "godliness". Hypocritically we bow our heads and "fast". But what is the loud cry that God desires?

:6 [Is] not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?

:7 [Is it] not to deal thy bread to the hungry, and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him; and that thou hide not thyself from thine own flesh?

And then suddenly this exceedingly loud talk on mercy turns into an equally loud talk on the Sabbath. Did you ever wonder about that "change of topic"? It is no change of topic at all! For Sabbath means mercy.

It belongs to the story--and most ironically so--that the Sabbath had been made the most merciless burden of all. Almost an entire people had, by the time of Christ's first advent, come under the yoke, and the worst one imaginable: the yoke of legalist self-dependence, self-salvation.

In direct contrast to this, true Sabbath observance is shown. There is no reduction of its significance, no exemption from its real claims. There is just a touching appeal to accept its genuine spirit, and a beautiful description of its matchless charms:

"If thou turn away thy foot from the Sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day, and call the Sabbath a delight, the holy of the Lord, honorable and shalt honor Him, not doing thy own ways, nor speaking thy own words, then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord. And I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and feed thee with the heritage of Jacob, thy father, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken." (verses 13 & 14).

What a positive conclusion of the Loud Cry, so entirely compatible with the unbribable realism of strict law-abidingness, and still--or just therefore--filled to the brim with fatherly tenderness and mercy. What a touching portrait of the Sabbath, and the Lord of the Sabbath. Here we certainly get all due information about the meaning of sanctification within the glorious framework of the Sabbath's peculiar rainbow halo.

But what happened here among God's people, as, from generation to generation, prophet after prophet stood up and started raising, anew, with exactly the loudness that the Lord had ordered, that insistent cry for mercy, mercy for the lowliest ones and the most downtrodden ones?

Sad to say, almost invariably history tended to arrive at a point where the cry seemed to become so disturbingly loud, in the ears of the people, that they simply could not bear it--probably for the secret reason that their own guilty conscience joined in crying, as it were, thus amplifying the original cry with a raucous undertone that was particularly unbearable. And then the prophet, if possible at all, was hushed into silence, or as close to silence as you can hope to come without directly cutting the man's vocal chords. Then for some time it was the people themselves who decided the degree of "loudness" of the cries in that land. ... "Have some sense of decent moderation", they seem to be whispering. "Whatever you do, please don't speak that loud! Somebody outside might hear you, and label you 'a fanatic'. Whatever you do, you must avoid every suspicion of belonging to that group. You must not become a fanatic. It is fanatics who have the uncouth habit of speaking loud."

In other words, it definitely is not according to the code of good manners among us to be vociferous. When voices get too loud, it arouses disagreeable attention. In our "modesty" we prefer to be among the rather unnoticed ones. Even our Sabbaths we seem to want as unnoticed as feasible. We sometimes even seem to be saying: "See to it, dear brother, that you do not cause the very name of the institution to which you belong, to become, in itself, some kind of Loud Cry. Do not use, for instance, to an unnecessary degree, the designation Seventh-day Adventist Church in full spelling, but preferably Adventist Church. That is peculiar enough and unpopular enough already. Abbreviations are the order of the day."

And what about "mercy"? "Oh, my brother! That kind of thing can easily be carried to extremes. You should watch your proper confines when it comes to deeds of mercy toward the suffering ones. For instance, if those who suffer should happen to be just animals, moderation becomes particularly incumbent on you. Let the "Friends of Animals" have a monopoly on loud speaking in this field. For please watch your step, it may turn out to be directly harmful to speak too loud about innocently suffering animals. That applies both to those in the zoos and those in the research laboratories of great medical institutions. Please do not speak too loud about these things. Remember again: it is fanatics who are so unrefined in their manners that they find it necessary to speak loud!"

What a biased wholesale judgment passed on loud speaking and loud cries! Of course we do know that the reasons why people speak loud are not always necessarily the noblest. We know too well the story about the orator who at a given point in his manuscript had the following note in the margin for his own guidance when he was to deliver his speech: "The argument somewhat weak here, speak loud." But of course it would not be too reverent to claim about God that when He raises His voice to give special emphasis to His message to men, then that is because He finds His argument somewhat deficient. God's children ever so often fail to discern, in His Loud Cry, the divine call to mercy and true humaneness.

In persistent cases of that kind, the character of the cry may change in a most alarming way. It turns into a cry of judgment. What destiny-laden thing has happened to the prophetic message in that case?

In the instance of the Sabbath commandment in Biblical prophecy this appears rather dramatically. Another phase, as it were, of the same commandment is entering into focus. That is a phase in which the point of gravity has been moved, so to speak. The message has turned into a revelation of God from the angle that is least appreciated by human beings: His quality as the sternly authoritative, the almighty Creator whose word is a shaking drama, the great eschaton.(judgement)

In its solemn eschatological setting the Loud Cry comes to us in the terms of the seer of Patmos:

"And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation and kindred and tongue and people, saying with a loud voice, Fear God and give glory to Him, for the hour of His judgment is come: and worship Him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of water." Rev. 14:1,7.

We recognize here every theme of the Sabbath commandment: tender mercy as exemplified by the great Merciful One, the Lord of the Gospel; and all along with this, His majestic creative power, lending authority and force to His mercy command. In fact, the call at this juncture is in a setting of judgment. The church's own refusal to heed the original loud cry for mercy is the direct reason why it was destined to become a cry of judgment:

"And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication." Rev. 14:8.

There is a tremendous crescendo, as the prophet comes right to the mark of distinction, pressed upon the foreheads and the hands of the unfaithful ones, so glaringly contrasted with the distinguishing mark imprinted in the minds and hearts of God's faithful ones.

"And the third angel followed them saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand, the same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God." Rev. 14:9,10.

But the real climax of this crescendo is reached in Rev. 18. The cry of the three angels is here being amplified in an unexpected way by an angel little noticed so far, but suddenly coming upon the scene with an unparalleled loudness in his voice. The character of judgment and finality has become overwhelming:

"And after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power, and the earth was lightened with his glory, and he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird." Rev. 18:1,2.

Here the prophet has obviously come to a point where it is not enough for him any longer to inform us that the angel was "saying" this ("legon"); no, this time he "cried it out" ("ekraxen").

This is definitely endtime judgment in terms of doom (krima). But at the same time there is still a tremendously efficient judgment in terms of crisis (krisis). By the very drama of surrounding events men are called upon to decide where they want to belong, to "come out", honestly and demonstratively, just accepting the seal of the living God, His merciful and gracious rest, an Eternal Sabbath.

In the fourth verse of the same chapter this tone of mercy in the midst of the tone of doom is particularly audible. There is a change of tones in another significant respect also here. What is now heard is not the voice of an angel any longer. This is the voice of God Himself. This is the Saviour specifically turning to those whom He is bent on considering as His personal property, those who He makes His own, wholly and fully, by just setting them apart, sanctifying them. Of course there is tender affection vibrating as the constant overtone of that voice. But there is also a stern and ultimate call to settle for exclusive fellowship with Him. Not the slightest mingling with the world is possible now. The issues are too clear, indeed. Half-heartedness is bound to be an unknown concept. Man has definitively come down into the valley of decision:

**A PERSON'S LIFE
IS THE LOUDEST CRY HE CAN EVER MAKE!**

"And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, lest you take part in her sins and share in her plagues." Rev. 18:4, New English Bible.

And now, what does this have to do with the Sabbath commandment? Of course we do know, if we are at all attentive and knowledgeable, that something strangely dramatic enters upon the scene with that fourth commandment. The very first texts in the Bible dealing with the Sabbath testify to that fact. And what happens as time passes? The Sabbath commandment assumes a character of something gradually sharpening or

intensifying. There is something ever more pointed about it. New aspects of its nature are flashing out.

To be or not to be, that is the question. And anything less than that could hardly be expected in the case of a commandment which is so intimately wound up with the issue of sanctification. The God of the Sabbath is not only the God whose name is Jealous, but that "jealousy" makes Him stand out precisely as the God who insists on having His intelligent creatures sanctified.

To sanctification there is only one known alternative: that is, the great fall--self-destruction. God graciously permits the creaturely person who does not accept life on the terms on which He is able to offer it, to just sink back into the state of non-existence. But to the one who has already been granted the glorious privilege of existing, on the highest level offered to any creature, non-life is bound to be tantamount to bottomless perdition. The will-freedom he has been endowed with pushes him irresistibly toward the great either-or. The concept of "rest" in this pointed case has nothing to do with passivity or flabbiness (laxness). "Rest" here means sanctification, and that is no timeless Nirvana. It rather has the endtime crescendo built into it. Everything here is inexorably pointed toward a final goal, the dramatic rescue of "the brand plucked out of the fire" (Zec. 3:2).

There is a tremendous solemnity settling down, as it were, over the passage at this point.

The history of the kingdoms of the earth is just reaching its final phase. The destruction is delayed only during that brief spell of time it takes to consummate the work of the sealing, described in detail in Revelation 7. There is breathless stillness in man's world, but it is the stillness before the storm:

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God; and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads." (Rev. 7:1-3).

We all know that the seal at the time of the ancient kingdom was synonymous with the signature, the name and the title of the commanding one. And we all know that the seal of Christ, our Creator, is to be found in the Sabbath commandment only. This, also, makes it unique in the law of God.

Notice how Ellen G. White links the third angel's message of Revelation 14 with the Loud Cry of Isaiah 58: "The light we have received upon the Third Angel's Message is the true light. The Mark of the Beast is exactly what it has been proclaimed to be. Not all in regard to this matter is yet understood, nor will it be understood until the unrolling of the scroll; but a most solemn work is to be proclaimed in our world. The Lord's

command to His servant is, `Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and show my people their transgression...(Isaiah 58:1)'. 6T 17.

The caution rightly observed about applying the phrase, "receiving the mark of the beast", should be well known: Something fateful is bound to happen to modern man, once he has been really confronted with the law of God in its entirety and with the challenge contained in its supreme test of obedience. If he has responded to that test with an open defiance against God's clear command, then-and only then-can he be described as having "received the mark of the beast". For only then has the definitive choice been made between the seal of God and the mark of the beast.

But in the above quotation something more comes out which must fill with solemn earnestness every person who professes to belong to the people of God. For it is to such a person, first and foremost, that the loud cry of warning in Isaiah 58 is addressed. The Sabbath commandment is specifically mentioned in that chapter; and in what capacity first of all? As a cry for mercy.

So the nature of the reform so urgently demanded is not a matter of doubt. It calls for a transformation in you and me from mercilessness to mercifulness. Without that transformation we are utterly nonsensical if we go to others warning them against taking the mark of the beast. We ourselves may be the ones in the greatest need of a message of warning. Some of those to whom we would like to go with our great message of the abiding Sabbath, might have, in their very lives, a tremendous lesson to teach you and me, a lesson about the very thing the Sabbath stands for: MERCY. That is the Loud Cry message of Isaiah 58. A person's life is the loudest cry he can ever make. A person's life is the loudest cry he can ever make!

Where Did the WEEK Come From??

Considered from the viewpoint of human rationalism the Sabbath may seem to have a certain degree of "arbitrariness" about it. Take the very idea of dividing time into units containing just seven days each. Does that make any sense, humanly speaking?

If we go back to the smaller temporal unit, the day, that is an altogether different matter. For this is at least a dividing up of time based on a definite astronomical fact: a day is just the time this globe of ours takes to make one turn around its own axis. To any observer this "makes sense"; similarly for certain larger units of time, for instance the month and the year. They are self-evident divisions based on rationally acceptable mathematical and astrophysical relations.

But who ever hit upon the idea of dividing time into weeks? We must be reasonably justified--as far as human knowledge and human reason are concerned--in qualifying that idea as somewhat "arbitrary". So this question presents itself: Who has had the incomparable "arbitrariness" to command, with an unmistakably authoritative voice:

"Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: But the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord, thy God: In it thou shalt not do any work, thou nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates." Exodus 20:8-10.

The Lord thy God!!