

Rome's Arraignment of Sabbath-Breakers

By J. O'Keefe

The editors are pleased to share with you a centennial reprint of a sermon by a J. O'Keefe. This sermon was first printed in the July 3, 1897, issue of the Catholic Mirror and then reprinted that same month by the Seventh-day Adventist Church in a tract entitled Bible Student Library, No. 150, July 1897. We believe our readers will find this sermon to be significant in the light of the ongoing controversy regarding the Bible Sabbath. All emphasis reflects that which appeared in the "Bible Student Library" tract. Any additions made by the editors of Our Firm Foundation are indicated with [square brackets], though some were in the original. The original footnotes on page one of the "Bible Student Library" tract are as follows:

The gentleman referred to [J. O'Keefe] is a priest of prominence in the Roman Catholic diocese of Baltimore, Md., and the paper that thus publishes the sermon is the leading Catholic paper of America, the organ of Cardinal Gibbons.

The Scripture quotations are often [loosely quoted], sometimes from the Catholic Douay-Rheims version, and sometimes from the King James Version. The reader will find no essential difference. We leave them unchanged, merely correcting typographical errors, and punctuating in the ordinary way.

On last Sunday Rev. J. O'Keefe delivered a sermon at St. John's Church, which will be of interest to our readers to reproduce in full. He spoke as follows:

"But these men blaspheme whatever things they know not; and what things soever they naturally know, like dumb beasts, in these they are corrupted" See Jude 10.

The morning paper of last Monday spread before its readers a compendium [collection] of seven sermons delivered the day before, by as many Baptist preachers, on the topic of Sabbath desecration. This simultaneous concert of action was the result of previous arrangement.

As it is the duty of every citizen who has at heart the public welfare to aid, as far as possible, in promoting the diffusion of knowledge, and at the same time in the correction of error, I feel I would be guilty of a gross injustice to my fellow citizens were I not to furnish them with the exact truth, especially since false ideas are being constantly promulgated [published] by men either grossly and criminally ignorant of what they should know, and who, assuming the office of public guides, convey false information derived either from false premises, or inconsecutive conclusions from the same, or, knowing better, maliciously and unscrupulously abuse the influence they accidentally wield over simple and unsophisticated people, by deliberately impregnating their ductile [easily molded] and plastic minds with erroneous views that practically interfere with the rational exercise of their liberty in the ordinary routine of life.

In the fifteenth chapter, tenth verse, of the Acts of the Apostles, we read of a case in point. A sect of the Pharisees [converts to Christianity] gave much annoyance to the primitive Christians by requiring circumcision and the full observance of the Mosaic Law. Peter arose in the assembly and asked, "Now therefore, why tempt ye God, to put a yoke on the necks of the disciples which

neither our fathers, nor we have been able to bear?" See Acts 15:10. A sect of the same order of modern Pharisees, in their self-righteousness, gave vent to their mock solicitude for the spiritual welfare of their contemporaries by denouncing most emphatically the practices of barrooms, cigars, tobacco, soda water, bicycles, confectionery, parks, trolley cars, Sunday papers, reporters, ice-cream saloons, etc., on Sunday, with a highly commendable and virtuous indignation; but it is my purpose to meet their crusade in the spirit of common sense, and ask with St. Peter, "Why, therefore, tempt ye God to put a yoke on the necks of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we have been able to bear?" And this is precisely what these self-constituted guides of the people undertake to do, when they assume to dictate into what is permitted and what is forbidden on the Sabbath.

And, just here, I boldly proclaim that this meddlesome interference with the God-given liberties of our citizens is an assumption of authority that has no warrant whatsoever in God's law, and amounts to what may be truthfully designated an impertinent attempt at an unauthorized despotism [absolute power, tyranny]. For whilst the American people are tolerant of every law, divine and human, that appeals to their reason, yet they must be convinced that the ordinance has a divine or human sanction for the enforcement of its obligations.

It is my purpose to submit to my fellow citizens the true grounds for the obligation of cessation from labor one day of the week, and of the duty of sanctifying the same day. The seven reverend gentlemen who on last Sunday assumed to impose their views on their fellow citizens anent [concerning] the question of Sabbath desecration, have no warrant whatsoever for such imposition [a burdensome unfair demand], save what can be found in their acknowledged teacher, the Bible. Let us then open the pages of this guide and teacher, and learn from it the commands of God on this point. We are at least equally intelligent with them in construing the expressed will of God, in drawing rational conclusions, and in inferring conclusively the correctness or falsity of their claim to impose their views on us.

The first intimation that reaches us of God's will on this important point is found in Genesis 2:2: "And on the seventh day He [God] rested . . . from all His work which He had made." And it is conclusive that the patriarchs under the immediate direction of God, continued, by oral tradition, the same observance of God's Sabbath, until He gave through Moses the same commandment by written tradition (see Exodus 20:8-11), "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" and the sacred text informs us He did so command for that reason, viz. [namely]: Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day, and sanctified it." See Exodus 20:11. Again, the Lord calls the Sabbath "a perpetual covenant." See Exodus 31:16.

Once more, we will refer to the most positive repetition of this command (see Deuteronomy 5:13-14): "Six days shalt thou labour, and shalt do all thy work. The seventh is the day of the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not do any work therein," etc.

On a careful examination of the Old Testament, we find this reference to the Sabbath 126 times. And now it is incumbent on us to ascertain which is the seventh day on which God rested, and which He blessed and sanctified: which day, also, He designated as "a perpetual covenant." The answer to this question is furnished by the Hebrew race, who all through the patriarchal age to Moses' day, over 2,500 years, thence from Moses 2514 A. M. [B.C.] to A.D. 1897, a period of 5,897 years, have scrupulously kept every Saturday, from the days of Adam, who walked with God, through the days of the patriarchs, the law, and the prophets, and through the full period of the New Law to yesterday [Saturday]. Thus the Hebrew race form a living historical chain of nearly 5,900 annual links—a perpetual, living testimony of God's rest (His Sabbath) to today, through oral and written tradition. Therefore, if the testimony of men could ever be regarded as an infallible motive of credibility, it must be recognized as such in the constant weekly [cycle] keeping of God's Sabbath synchronous [having identical periods] with time itself.

The Old Testament is also, from the days of Moses, the living witness of this undeniable fact, sustained by the oral living testimony of the Hebrew people to the advent of the Messiah. To deny this effectively, it would be necessary to destroy the Jewish people and the Old Testament.

Having placed beyond the reach of all successful denial; the grand historical fact that up to the coming of the Messiah, the Lord's Sabbath—that of the seventh day—was alone recognized and kept, from the last day of Creation to the coming of the Messiah—this by the positive precept of God in the Old Law and the ever-living testimony and practice of the Hebrew race, it now behooves us to trace the history of this arrangement to date, or as far, at least, as the apostolic records testify under the New Law. On approaching this period, involving as it does an era of nearly nineteen full centuries, we naturally inquire whether a divine statute, which God Himself was pleased to designate a "perpetual covenant," continued to be observed by the people of Israel and Christians collectively; that is, whether the day enjoined by God (Saturday) has always been kept by Christians and Jews collectively for these nineteen centuries, or, if not, where in the pages of the New Testament is found a divine decree canceling the mandate of the Old Law, and at the same time specifying the day to substitute [for] Saturday. For inasmuch as Saturday was ordered to be kept by divine authority, so, also, divine authority, under the form of a canceling decree, is absolutely necessary to do away with Saturday, and another decree emanating from the same divine source is equally necessary to appoint another Sabbath. A close and critical examination of the New Testament is now necessary to discover these two decrees—the one canceling Saturday, the other selecting another day to replace it.

The Hebrew Sabbath, or Saturday, is referred to in the New Testament 61 times. In the four Gospels the same Sabbath (Saturday) is mentioned 51 times. We find that the Saviour during life constantly adopted the same day to teach in the synagogues and to work miracles.

In one instance, quoted by Matthew and Luke [Mark]. He designated Himself the "Lord of the Sabbath;" but to the last hour of His life He utilized that day and gives no indication of a desire to change it. After His crucifixion, His apostles and personal friends kept it (Saturday) strictly, whilst yet [He was] in the tomb; that St. Luke informs us of (see 23:56): "And they returned, and prepared spices and ointments; and rested on the Sabbath day according to the commandment." And having strictly kept the Sabbath, as St. Luke has just now described, they felt themselves free to commence the new week with the corporal work of mercy, viz., embalming the body of their Master.

This proceeding is quoted by St. Luke in the next verse (see 24:1): "And on the first day of the week [Sunday], very early in the morning, they came to the sepulchre, bringing the spices they had prepared." Can anything be more conclusive than that up to the day of Christ's death, from St. Luke's testimony?

Thus we are forced from all we read in the Gospels to conclude that the "Lord of the Sabbath," as Christ calls Himself, never kept during his mortal life any other Sabbath than Saturday, testifying His respect for it on several occasions by His severe rebukes to the scribes and Pharisees for their fanatical mode of keeping it; and after His death the apostles, and the holy women, who were the best exponents [representatives] of His will, followed His example by doing on Sunday what the commandment forbade them to do on Saturday. It is then undeniable that the Jewish Saturday was alone kept by the Saviour, His apostles, and friends up to the period of His death, covering thirty-three years of the Christian era.

Come we now to examine the history of this interesting question for thirty years more after Christ's death, as recorded by the evangelist St. Luke, in his Acts of the Apostles. Surely we must find some trace of the canceling act during this period involving a lifetime. But, alas! Not a vestige of it can be discovered; and what is worse, we find in the nine passages referred to in the Acts of the Apostles that they invariably kept Saturday. I shall quote them: "They . . . went

into the synagogue on the Sabbath day, . . . And after the reading of the law and the prophets," etc. See Acts 13:14-15. Again, verse 27: "For they . . . because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath," etc. Behold here the testimony of St. Paul to the practice of reading the Scriptures every Sabbath. He does not say "were read," but "are read," thus bearing witness to a time-honored practice.

Again, verse 42: "And when the Jews had gone out, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next Sabbath," not the next Sunday. Observe next how the Greeks or Gentiles kept the Sabbath with the Jews (see verse 44): "And the next Sabbath came almost the whole city to hear the Word of God." Not Sunday, but the Sabbath still!

Once more (see Acts 15:13, 21): James, the apostle, publicly says: "Men and brethren, hear now to me. . . . For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every Sabbath day." No vestige of a change to Sunday yet. Again (see Acts 17:2): "And Paul, as his manner was, went unto them, and three Sabbath days reasoned with them out of the Scriptures." And, to cap the climax and exhaust all scriptural resources (see Acts 18:4): "And he [Paul] reasoned in the synagogue every Sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks."

Thus it is absolutely certain that neither our Lord during His life of thirty-three years, nor His apostles for thirty years subsequently, ever kept any Sabbath save Saturday.

But, before I close my argument, I propose to answer the argument of the apologists for the change of day not to be found in the New Testament. Their arguments are grounded on the words "the Lord's day" and "the day of the Lord," as the drowning man grasps a straw. The first of these (see Acts 2:20): "The sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood before that great and notable day of the Lord shall come." Is this Sunday? Again (see 1 Corinthians 1:8): "Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that you may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ." Who is silly enough to interpret these words [as being] of Sunday? Again (see 1 Corinthians 5:5): "To deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." Is this Sunday? Again (see 2 Corinthians 1:13-14): "And I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end . . . even as ye also are ours in the day of the Lord Jesus Christ." Is this day Sunday or the day of judgment? Whilst once more (see Philippians 1:6): "Being confident of this very thing that He who hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ." Until next Sunday, of course! Sixth text (see Philippians 1:10): "That ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ." Till next Sunday, forsooth! Seventh text (see 2 Peter 3:10): "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night." Sunday next! Eighth text (see 2 Peter 3:12): "looking out for and hastening unto the coming of the day of the Lord, wherein the heavens being on fire, shall be dissolved." Look out for the fireworks on Sunday, if not too late today [Sunday]!

I have thus disposed of eight of nine texts from the apostolic writings which the apologists for the change of day grounded on the words, "the day of the Lord," "the Lord's day," "the day of Christ," and shown the absurdity of their application to Sunday, referring in each instance to the day of judgment. There is a ninth, and the only one left which does not bear its own interpretation like the others (see Revelation 1:10). St. John says, "I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day." The rule of analogy, a certain motive of judging whereby we are enabled to conclude with certainty of an unknown quantity from the known, applies here unqualifiedly. Eight texts, of a similar form and character to a ninth, have been shown to unite in one meaning exclusively. Dialecticians [specialists in dialects] conclude that the ninth must be so interpreted. Or, to present a more intelligible example from physical laws: Eight stones thrown into the air fall by the law of gravity to the surface; the ninth it is conclusive must obey the same law. Hence the words of St. John admit of the same interpretation by analogy as the eight preceding texts.

Any attempt to interpret the above texts, the day of the Lord or the Lord's day, as meaning Sunday, is therefore absurd. And what will confirm this reasoning beyond all doubt is the language of the same St. John in two passages in his Gospels; speaking of Sunday (Easter) he does not say, "on the Lord's day," but (see chapter 20:19), "Now when it was late that same day, the first of the week." This disposes forever of St. John's "I was in the spirit on the Lord's day," interpreted as Sunday.

A False Supposition

To conclude my proofs, I propose to call attention to and reply to an argument that would suppose a change of day. Five times the first day of the week is referred to as being the day substituted for the Sabbath in five passages of the Gospel, Acts, and Epistles. St. Luke 24:33-40 and St. John 20:19 both refer to the meetings of Jesus with the apostles on Easter Sunday. This would appear to furnish a clue to the substitution of Saturday; but the texts themselves record the motive of their meeting. It was not for prayer, for exhortation, or reading of the Scriptures, but they were huddled together in that room "for fear of the Jews," as St. John tells us.

The third occasion was the meeting of Christ arisen with the eleven (including Thomas), as St. John assures us (see chapter 20:26-29). There is not a word to be found in these texts of prayer, praise, or reading of the Scriptures. Again (see Acts 2:1), "The apostles were all of one accord in one place" on the feast of Pentecost (Sunday). Nor can this fourth instance of meeting on Sunday afford the slightest hope of finding an escape; for Pentecost was the fiftieth day from the Passover, which was called the Sabbath of weeks, consisting of seven times seven days; and the day after the seventh weekly Sabbath was the chief day in the entire festival, necessarily Sunday, which had been kept by the Jews annually for over 15 centuries before Christianity. This was over a festival, and no comfort can be derived from its introduction in favor of a change of day, from the sacred volume.

And the apologists for the change of day call attention to Acts 20:7: "And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread," etc. the application of the axiom in logic, "Quod probat nimis, probat nihil" (What proves too much, proves nothing), puts a quietus [release from obligation] on this text when I introduce words from the Acts (see 2:46): "And they continuing daily. . . in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house," etc., which shows that this was a daily practice which is claimed in this instance for Sunday.

Fifthly and finally, we are invited to 1 Corinthians 16:1-2: "Now concerning the collection for the saints. . . . On the first day of the week, let every one of you lay by him in store," etc. Presuming that this was done as St. Paul requested, I will call your attention to what was regularly done the day before (Saturday) and contrast the acts of each day. I have already quoted St. Paul's testimony (see Acts 13:27) of the practice of reading the Scriptures "every Sabbath day."

What more absurd conclusion than to infer that the reading of the Scriptures, exhortation, and praying, which formed the routine duties of every Saturday, or Sabbath, were overslaughed (passed over in favor of another), by a request to take up a collection, on a particular occasion, another day of the week? Which occupation was more in keeping with the service of the Lord's day?

The Summing Up

Having placed before you all the references in the sacred writings—Gospels, Acts, and Epistles—I will now sum up the result of my examination of the relative use of the Sundays and Saturdays from these same records, constituting the New Testament, and covering a period of over 60 years. Every Sabbath, or Saturday, was kept, according to the record, 3,279 times by Christ and His apostles, whilst the beggarly record of the Sunday meetings by the apostles

number five within the same period, viz., Easter Sunday (finding Sunday) comes first; next, Sunday (doubting Sunday) when Thomas was converted; but not a prayer, nor reading of the Scripture, nor preaching on either occasion; Pentecost Sunday, a part of the ceremonial law of the Jews kept for 1,500 years before; the Sunday referred to in Acts 20:7, where the breaking of bread alone is referred to, but which in Acts 2:46 is designated a daily work; and fifthly, collection Sunday (1 Corinthians 16:1-2) has no vestige of prayer, reading of Scripture, sermon, or any other act of divine worship connected with it. Add to these, nine references to the "Lord's day;" "the day of the Lord," "the day of Christ," mentioned nine times, each one of which refers, as I have proved, to the day of judgment, and you have every vestige of any claim that might be made of a change of day from Saturday during the period of over 60 years from the dawn of Christianity.

With this truthful and exhaustive exposition before us, based in the Sacred Writings, and against which I defy successful contradiction, let us apply our valuable information practically to the existing position of Protestantism and its relative bearing on Judaism, because they both acknowledge the same teacher, the Bible, with this difference, however, whilst the Jew's teacher, the Old Testament, closes with the Messiah's coming, the Biblical Christian has the New Testament super-added to the Old, whilst he enjoys the teaching and practice of the Saviour together with those of the apostles for over 60 years, and all these in perfect conformity with the Old Testament. For whilst the Jewish people—patriarchs, law, and prophets—have, after the example of God Himself, kept "the Sabbath of the Lord" for nearly 6,000 years, up to yesterday [Saturday], the New Testament, the supplemental teacher of Protestantism, testifies to the positive teachings of the Saviour, "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy;" and His life and those of the apostles, as we learn from the Sacred Record, were in perfect keeping with the practice of the Jewish people. Today, however, so-called followers of Christ, (who was Himself to the hour of His death an obedient follower of the law of the Sabbath), in direct contradiction of the law and the Gospel, have for over three centuries raised the flag of revolt against this "perpetual covenant." As God Himself is pleased to call it, and for fully 10 generations not one representative of Protestant Christianity, with a feigned and hypocritical affection of respect for his teacher, the Bible, has once kept the day ordered to be kept over 160 times by the Old Testament and over 60 times by the New.

A more transparent contradiction, involving millions of human beings, does not exist in the earth today—a teacher, assumed to be of divine origin by its disciples—utterly ignored, and the voice of God Himself echoing in every page, as they profess to believe, utterly disregarded by every Protestant Christian on earth today, for not one¹ of them has once obeyed His command to keep His Sabbath, during life. Christ, as their teacher, informs them, "If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments," and the chief and most emphatic of these is, "Remember the Sabbath day."

FOOTNOTE:

- 1. The author had evidently overlooked, or else he does not count as among Protestants, two influential though small bodies of Christians—namely, Seventh-day Adventist, numbering 40,000 [now approximately nine million] communicants, and Seventh-day Baptists, numbering 10,000 [now approximately 30,000]—who observe, according to the commandment, the same Sabbath instituted of God, and kept by prophet and apostle and by our Lord Jesus Christ.

Viewing the situation from a common-sense standpoint, it is almost incredible that men endowed with average intelligence could consent to occupy before the world for an hour, such a self-stultifying [ridiculous], self-contradictory position as this. Professing to adore God, professing to obey His commands, yet they stand today before heaven and earth, with His Written Word clasped to their breast, and which they profess to obey, the most pronounced Sabbath-breakers on earth.

The Jew is rational; he obeys his teacher, the Bible, pointing to the command, "Keep holy the Sabbath;" the Catholic is ever rational, he obeys the teacher [the Church] appointed him by Christ; but the Protestant obeys neither God nor his teacher, the Bible. Thus I have in this sermon shown his utter abandonment of his professed teacher, the Bible, and his public apostasy from the positive injunctions of God, speaking to him through it; but he had descended to a still lower depth of degradation. Having abandoned the teachings of his Bible, and having poured out the vials of his apparently honest indignation against the Catholic Church, all his life he is found today, after having consummated his apostasy from his own religious principles and teacher, knocking at the door of the Catholic Church to notify her that he is about to borrow her day; thus this traitor to his professed teacher and guide throws open the doors of his meeting-house on each Sunday with a notice overhead, "OPEN EVERY ROMAN SABBATH.' 'CLOSED EVERY Bible SABBATH,' whilst the notice on every synagogue on Saturday reads, OPEN TO-DAY, THE BIBLE SABBATH." Nor does his unscrupulous treachery to his Bible end here; but with insolent swagger [boasting] and cool effrontery [boldness], like Cain, addressing his descendants on brotherly love, with the broad brand of murderer on his brow; like Judas moralizing on deicide [the killing of a god]; like the squatter who insolently intrudes himself; and like the robber glorying in his ill-gotten goods; in a word, like Satan rebuking sin, he inveighs [vehemently attacks], through his seven clerical drummers, against barrooms, cigars, tobacco, soda water, bicycles, confectionery, parks, trolley cars, Sunday papers, reporters, ice cream saloons, etc., etc., whilst there is not a living representative of these different avocations [one's regular work] whose records before the bar of reason, religion, and God are not comparatively immaculate when contrasted with the record of these very people who stand before God, reason, and religion as the most inveterate [persistent] Sabbath-breakers on earth.

Before closing this discourse, I publicly invite those seven reverends, and all their confederate Sabbath-breakers, to purge themselves from the above imputation [attributing of personal guilt].

But I predict with absolute certainty that the seven eloquent orators of last Sunday will be mute and dumb next and future Sundays on this subject.

Editorial Remarks

In the foregoing paper we do not adopt nor do we commend the harshness, sharpness, or acerbity [sourness] of language in which Mr. O'Keefe has set forth the two solemn facts: (1) That the only Bible Sabbath is the seventh day; and (2) that for first-day sacredness or observance there is no Bible warrant. We would that these facts had been told in a milder manner, in language which it seems to us would be more consonant [alike in sound] with the Gospel of Christ; but we beg the Protestant reader to forget the acidity of the writing, and weigh the solemn facts in the light of the Bible and the judgment. [The Editors of the Bible Student Library.]