

Preserve The Sabbath: Case In Point

Back in 1869, Canada's Timothy Eaton decided that it was only proper that the windows of his store be draped on Sunday so that there would be no worldly attraction for the public. Just a few years ago this policy changed without any objections from the window shopping public.

In 1892, Dr. H. Bavinck visited Toronto, Ont. The occasion was the delivery of a guest lecture for the Alliance of the Reformed Churches holding the Presbyterian System. Dr. Bavinck liked Toronto. He thought that it was one of the most beautiful cities in Canada. He was also impressed by the population's attitude towards the Lord's Day. The Sabbath keeping was even stricter in Toronto than in England. No Sunday newspapers were sold. All stores, without exception, were closed. The streets were virtually deserted. Puritan principles reigned.

Gone are many customs of the past. How many still have Sabbath preparation? On Saturday evening the shoes were to be polished in readiness for Sunday. Potatoes and vegetables were to be all ready for the Sunday meal so that there might be a minimum of labour on the Lord's Day. The Christian tradition of observing the Lord's Day has been very much the history of the province of Ontario, as it has in all the other Canadian provinces, and indeed in most countries of the Western world.

Alarming is the trend that wants to abolish the Sunday. The hue and cry is: "We don't want to be dictated by a Christian minority. Why be bothered with Victorian blue laws?" I don't think however that Sunday abolitionists quite realize the implications of their reasoning. Do Canadians really want an "open" Sunday free from all restraints? In the Philippines, Sabbath keeping is difficult for Christians.

Sunday is almost like any other day for many. Streets are crowded. Markets and many stores are open for business as usual. Farmers are working in their fields. Loaded sugar cane trucks lumber down the roads.

Early one Sunday morning, we heard a loud chattering noise. We looked out of the window and saw crowds of young people, at least a few hundred, working on our road. Of course I asked why these uniformed young people were busy cleaning ditches and attempting to fix our dirt covered, potholed road on Sunday. I discovered that this was part of their educational program. Since martial law came into force, high school students have to put in 120 hours of manual labour. This is part of the regular school curriculum. Any student who refuses to participate cannot graduate. Most of the work is done on Sunday with the help and supervision of the teachers.

Sunday observance in the Philippines is not the same as in Canada. Therefore, the Christians here find it hard to keep the Lord's Day holy. Canadian Christians can still do their best to keep Sunday as a very special day. But if Christians don't speak out, the Lord's Day as a special day can be lost by default.

First, there is still a substantial minority of Christians in Canada who attend church regularly. Their right of Sunday worship should be protected. Second, Sunday still has a social function even for non-church going people. A pause day is desperately needed in our rushed age. Just think of the feverish hurry and hustle of so many during the week. Shouldn't a person take a day off for complete relaxation? When a man disregards the day of rest he will suffer for it. Family life needs a day of rest. The present tendency of many industries to introduce shift work hampers regular, harmonious family life. Family life is in jeopardy already as it is. Why create more problems by having business "as usual" on Sunday? Why burden families with the added strain of a seven-day work week? Abraham Lincoln wrote:

As we keep, or break, the Sabbath day, we nobly save, or meanly lose, the last best hope by which man rises.

We need a common day off to give family and friends the opportunity to have fellowship with one another.

Don't let the pressure of the almighty dollar force us to do away with Sunday observance.

As a Christian I want to keep Sunday as the Lord's Day. I observe it because God wills it and is honoured by it. Let those of different persuasions at least consider the practical reasons for Sunday observance. Business as usual on Sunday? No! It dishonours God. It can interfere or even prevent the free exercise of Christian worship in church.

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