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# Sabbath Keepers of 17th-Century England

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*Sabbath and Sectarianism in 17th-Century England*,  
by David S. Katz, 1988 (E.J. Brill, 224 pages, \$60).

Victor Constantinus, Maximus Augustus, to the heretics.... All ye who devise and support heresies by means of your private assemblies...so long and unmeasured is the catalogue of your offenses, so hateful and altogether atrocious are they, that a single day would not suffice to recount them all.... Why then do I still bear with such abounding evil.... Why not at once strike, as it were, at the root of so great a mischief by a public manifestation of displeasure?...

We give warning by this present statute that none of you henceforth presume to assemble yourselves together. We have directed, accordingly, that you be deprived of all the houses in which you are accustomed to hold your assemblies....

[We] forbid the holding of your superstitious and senseless meetings, not in public merely, but in any private house or place whatsoever. Let those of you, therefore, who are desirous of embracing the true and pure religion, take the far better course of entering the Catholic Church...from this day forward none of your unlawful assemblies may presume to appear in any public or private place. Let this edict be made public [Eusebius, *Life of Constantine*, book 3, chapters 64-65].

With this decree, the first "Christian" emperor began to hound the Christians who were faithful to God and his law. The Church of God fled into "the wilderness" (Revelation 12:6). The year was A.D. 325.

Thus were the lurking-places of the heretics broken up by the emperor's command, and the savage beasts they harbored...driven to flight... [*ibid.*, chapter 66].

Tormented but not slain, the Church of God survived. Centuries later, after the Protestant Reformation, it revived in preparation for its great end-time work.

David Katz gives us an outsider's view of the reemergence of the Church of God. Though he does not grasp the true significance of the events he records, he supplies us with much information, illuminating this fascinating period. And he generally tells the story without prejudice against God's people.

## Elizabethan Sabbatarians?

Sabbatarian historians often begin the tale of the church's revival with this famous quotation from the Sabbath article in the 1881 edition of *Chamber's Encyclopaedia*:

Accordingly, in the reign of Elizabeth [1558-1603], it occurred to many conscientious and independent thinkers (as it had previously done to some Protestants in Bohemia), that the fourth commandment required of them the observance, not of the first, but of the specified *seventh* day of the week.

Unfortunately we do not know who these "many conscientious and independent thinkers" were. The encyclopedia named no names. It provided no documentation, nor has any writer since. Modern editions of the encyclopedia delete the reference altogether.

What we can document was a rising advocacy for making Sunday a Sabbath. English society had viewed Sunday as a day for sports and games. But Puritans viewed Sunday as a day of religious devotion. They were offended by these secular activities and argued that such activities profaned God's day. Yet Sunday was not the Sabbath. Nevertheless, Puritans not only treated Sunday as if it were the Sabbath, they called it the Sabbath. And they wanted the rest of England to agree.

David Katz begins *Sabbath and Sectarianism in Seventeenth-Century England* at the origin of the Puritan Sunday-Sabbath advocacy. From there, he takes us to modern Seventh-Day Adventism. This is the second important work by a non-Sabbatarian on Sabbatarian history to be published in 1988. The other book, *Andreas Fischer and the Sabbatarian Anabaptists*, by Daniel Liechty, was reviewed in the September-October issue.

David Katz, a religious historian, has in recent years concentrated on the relationships and attitudes of 16th- and 17th-century Englishmen to Jews. His history of Sabbatarianism sprang from that interest.

Though not Sabbath keepers, the Puritans paved the way, says Katz, for Sabbath keepers who came later. For Katz, modern Sabbatarian history does not have its origins in Jesus of Nazareth. Instead, he would say, Sabbatarianism is a natural outgrowth of the Puritan interest in the Old Testament. While not agreeing with his assessment of its origins, we can learn much from his study of Puritanism's impact upon it.

### Rich biographical details

The book's biographical material, unavailable in any other history, makes it a valuable contribution to Sabbatarian studies. Several surprises are in store for those who would read its pages.

For instance, you will learn of the man who served as a birth attendant for royalty. His family kept the secret of obstetrical forceps. Katz charges that in keeping this secret "the entire...family traditionally thrived on denying useful and life-saving knowledge to others" (page 80).

When his pastor, John James, was falsely accused of treason and was facing a horrible death by torture, the man apparently would not use his influence at court to save his pastor's life. Later disfellowshipped for a different matter, he then united with another Sabbatarian congregation. Full of social schemes, ecumenicism and vast ego, it is said he went mad before he died.

Then there was Thomas Tillam, who, before his Sabbatarian years, baptized a famous "false-Jew." The "Jew" turned out to be a Jesuit spy, and Tillam was the last to admit it. Later, he brought shame upon the church with his widely publicized scheme to establish a Sabbatarian commune in Germany. Renounced by most of the other Sabbatarian ministers, he and his followers proceeded into Europe and obscurity.

Katz also writes of Francis Bampfield. While in Dorchester jail, Bampfield accepted the Sabbath and raised a Sabbatarian church within the prison's walls. This tale has been told many times in Sabbatarian circles. But what is not often told is that Bampfield claimed to be a visionary.

Bampfield claimed that he had two visions while in prison (page 98). The first, he affirmed, took him to heaven, where he saw the glorified Jesus. After his release, Bampfield indicated that on occasion he still had this vision, "when he is in a right worshipping frame." The second vision involved seeing the Trinity. Bampfield remained a Trinitarian until his death. Considering these facts, dare we consider him a member of God's Church?

Then there was Edward Stennett, a doctor of medicine. He pastored a Sabbatarian congregation in Wallingford Castle.

Legal entry to the castle precincts could be had only by warrant from the Lord Chief Justice, so worshippers there were protected from prosecution. In order to circumvent this legal impasse, the local JP and a neighbourhood clergyman (whose family had been receiving free medical attention from Stennett) bribed a number of people to say that they had been present at an illegal conventicle. Stennett fought the case at the Newbury Assizes, and

through a series of accidents and coincidences the case against him was dismissed. First, the magistrate's son ran away with an actress, and in searching for him the father missed the assizes. The clergyman and a key witness died. The second witness broke a leg and could not attend. Finally, although Stennett's gardener was kept drunk for days to persuade him to perjure himself, he steadfastly refused to testify against his employer [pages 108-109].

These and many other interesting characters can be found in the pages of *Sabbath and Sectarianism in 17th-Century England*.

### Highly documented

*Sabbath and Sectarianism* is highly documented. Mr. Katz' primary sources are material generally available only to scholars living in England. He gleans additional facts from the archives of the Seventh-Day Baptist Church in America. Unfortunately, his concluding sections on the origins of Seventh Day Adventism are not so diligently investigated.

*Sabbath and Sectarianism* is not so much a history as it is a series of vignettes, loosely connected. It is as if the reader is traveling in a train. Most of the time he is looking down, unaware of the passing scenery. Occasionally he looks up, concentrates intently on what is passing by, and then looks away again. What is seen of the countryside is fascinating, but not complete. What is the traveler missing?

### Just a few errors

While generally well researched, the book contains several errors of which the reader should be aware.

The first of these involves John Traske, an early Sabbatarian who was arrested and tortured, and who then finally recanted his Sabbatarianism. He later joined the independent Sunday-observing congregation of Henry Jacob. (The Jacob church is considered the mother church of the Baptist movement in England.) In the late 1630s, Henry Jessey, who would become a secret Sabbatarian, pastored the congregation.

Katz claims several times that Jessey knew Traske, and that Traske influenced Jessey to keep the Sabbath. But Oscar Burdick, a Seventh-Day Baptist librarian and historian, disputes this claim. He states that Traske died without meeting Jessey, and that Jessey did not begin keeping the Sabbath until much later. There is no Sabbath connection, claims Burdick, from Traske to Jessey. Burdick writes, "If you use the new Katz book...be careful, for he has some mistakes in it" (personal correspondence with author, November 29, 1988).

Another error is the widely held belief that the London

churches sent Stephen Mumford to evangelize Rhode Island. Katz, having no reason to believe otherwise, repeats this error: "Their [the London Sabbatarians] decision to send Stephen Mumford of Bell Lane [one of the London congregations] as a missionary to the wilds of tolerant Rhode Island was pivotal" (page 135).

Mumford's move to Rhode Island was pivotal, but it was not planned by man. We have no evidence that Mumford was a member of the London churches. He probably fled England to escape its increasing intolerant religious atmosphere. Rhode Island offered him the religious liberty that England did not. When the Newport congregation was established, it was William Hiscox (a convert) who was chosen to lead them, not Mumford. Nevertheless, it was Mumford whom God used to establish the Sabbath in the colonies.

Mumford sailed from London, but did not come from London. He and his wife were members of the Tewkesbury Baptist congregation (later called the Natton Church). In 1986 Oscar Burdick discovered that the record book of this church had recently been deposited in the Gloucestershire County Record Office. Among the members listed were the Mumfords.

The Natton church was a mixed congregation containing both Sabbath keepers and Sunday observers. This perhaps explains why Stephen Mumford, upon his arrival in Newport, so readily worshiped with the Sunday-observing Baptist church located there. Katz probably could not have known of Burdick's discovery, so can be excused on this point.

#### Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian

*Sabbath and Sectarianism* also contains a few jewels of information important to us, but whose value is not recognized by Katz.

For instance, Katz refers in a footnote to a series of articles written about Mill Yard in 1946 in the journal *Notes and Queries*. The first article, "A Congregation of Sabbatarian and Unitarian Baptists," shows that the Mill Yard congregation had largely, though perhaps not entirely, been non-Trinitarian from at least the early 1800s.

This is in line with evidence from the Newport, Rhode Island, congregation, where baptismal candidates in the 1700s had to sign a non-Trinitarian declaration of faith. However, the declaration of faith was not overtly anti-Trinitarian. It simply named God the Father and Jesus Christ while ignoring the alleged personality of the Holy Spirit. It could be signed by both Trinitarians and non-Trinitarians. Trinitarians and non-Trinitarians worshiped in the same congregations.

Trinitarianism did not become the dominant view in the American Sabbatarian churches until after the Revolution. Since the colonial churches came from English influence, we might assume that their original,

predominantly non-Trinitarian views came from England. Katz' footnote gives us some support for that conclusion.

This would appear to be true even though Trinitarian views predominated in the English churches. For example, the Mill Yard church records of 1701 speak about the "Blessed Trinity" (*Church Book, Mill Yard...[Records 1673-1840]*, pages 120, 146-147; also Butler, "Into Pennsylvania's Spiritual Abyss," *The Pennsylvania Magazine*, April 1977, page 167).

Yet Joseph Davis Sr., an early member at Mill Yard, who was arrested with John James in 1661, is said in his autobiography to have taken a decidedly non-Trinitarian stance (Black, *The Last Legacy...*, pages 28-47, London, 1869, as referred by Richard Nickels, "Sabbatarian Baptists in England," page 11). Joseph Davis is recognized as the financial benefactor of the Sabbatarians in the early 1700s. It is through his will that a number of Sabbatarian congregations are known. His apparent non-Trinitarian views were not considered grounds for disfellowshipment, and therefore give testimony to the fact that Trinitarians and non-Trinitarians worshiped side-by-side in England as well as in America.

#### Validity of previous baptisms

We might be further interested to know whether these churches observed the Passover. Katz seems to answer this question. He casually comments as to when certain congregations took communion. Communion was celebrated at various times of the year, but not once on Passover (page 125). The Christian Passover was apparently unknown.

Intriguing to us is the additional revelation about the attitudes that these early American Christians had concerning their time of conversion and the validity of their baptisms. In England, the church records show that when members were added to the congregation, they did not have to be rebaptized if they had been previously immersed. The members in Rhode Island continued this same pattern.

Samuel Hubbard, one of the original members of the Newport congregation, wrote two years before his death:

My wife and I counted up this year 1686: my wife a creature 78 years, a convert 62 years, married 50 years, an independent & joined to a church 52 years, a baptist 38 years, a sabbath keeper 21 years. I a creature 76 years, a convert 60 years, an independent & joined to a church 52 years, a baptist 38 years, a sabbath keeper 21 years" [page 176].

Notice that they considered themselves converted more than 20 years before their baptisms. They considered their baptisms valid even though they were bap-

tized 17 years before they began to keep the Sabbath — quite different than from today.

These observations, though not central to Katz' theme, are important to us. They help us see more clearly the colonial and English Sabbatarian churches through their eyes, and not our own. That is essential if we are to report accurately on their history and condition.

#### The origins of the Seventh-Day Adventists

Katz then traces Sabbatarianism into the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. For me, this was the most disappointing part of the book.

Katz attempts to tie Sabbatarians and fundamentalists into a garment of weird science going back to the Hutchinsonians. The Hutchinsonians were a highly popular school of philosophers who rejected the discoveries and scientific approach of Isaac Newton. They argued that all true science should be pursued from scriptural principles. But those principles could not be so easily discovered.

They argued that the Scriptures had been corrupted by the Jews to hide the true Messiah. The Masoretic text, the Talmud and the Kabbala were all a part of this alleged Jewish conspiracy. Even Islam, the Koran and Arabic were said to be part of a Jewish plot. Reeking with anti-Semitism, these "scholars" sought to discover the original biblical text and to unlock its hidden meaning.

Hutchinsonianism dominated the theology at Oxford for many years and influenced some of the colonial educators at what is now Princeton. The one good thing that resulted from it was a revival in the study of Hebrew and the Old Testament. To refute it, Hutchinsonianism's critics had to study Hebrew.

Katz claims that Hutchinsonian views so strongly influenced the colonies that we owe the expansion of the Seventh-Day Baptists, the origin of the Millerite movement, the Seventh-Day Adventist Church and American

fundamentalism to them. I think he paints with too wide a brush. No evidence is offered that any Sabbatarian adhered to Hutchinsonian beliefs.

As for the Seventh-Day Adventists, those familiar with the official Seventh-Day Adventist history will find nothing new here. The evidence for numerous non-Seventh-Day Baptist Millerites who kept the Sabbath before the Great Disappointment, the significant Sabbatarian-Adventist opposition to Ellen G. White and the origins of the Church of God (7th Day) are completely ignored.

But once again we should not blame Katz for these deficiencies. He could not be expected to discover that story. Sabbatarian opponents of Ellen G. White have yet to widely distribute a thorough and well-documented history of that period.

For those interested in a non-Sabbatarian view of the origins of the Church of God (7th Day), I recommend Ingemar Linden's *1844 and the Shut Door Problem* (Uppsala, 1982, Almquist & Wiksell).

In conclusion, anyone who wants a thorough knowledge of English Sabbatarian history should be familiar with David Katz' *Sabbath and Sectarianism in 17th-Century England*. Despite its limitations and occasional errors, its wealth of biographical details make it well worth reading. It will be quoted for years to come.

Ralph G. Orr

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#### Money-Saving Idea

I just want to share a money-saving tip for our ministers to take advantage of, if they are not already doing so. This is in the area of parking fees for hospital visits — of which we all have a large number.

Most hospitals extend gratis parking in one form or another to clergymen. I have found almost all of them handle this privilege differently: some have a designated area reserved in the parking lot or garage. Others will validate your parking ticket with a stamp at the information desk. Some will give you a token to use at the gate as you leave. One has given me a magnetic card to activate the gate as I leave, and some simply have you tell the person at the toll gate that you are a minister.

In almost all cases this privileged parking benefit can be explained and worked out through the receptionist at the information desk. If not there, someone will direct you to the proper official or department within the hospital. Some may ask you to provide your ordination card for verification. I estimate I save \$50-\$100 per year this way and hopefully others can, too.

David Orban