

Hands Across the Gulf

The Lord's Day Alliance and Seventh-day Adventists

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ALSO IN THIS ISSUE: The Other Side of Left Behind

As you are well-aware, it will be a coalition of the churches which will coerce the U.S. Congress into passing a National Sunday Law. In the 19th century, the National Reform Movement led out in that effort. In the 20th, it has been the Lord's Day Alliance, headquartered in Atlanta, Georgia.

You will find some of the historical background of the Sunday law movement in America on pages 44-46 of our paperback, *Mark of the Beast*.

An article, entitled *The Lord's Day Man: James Pickett Wesberry*, appeared in the spring 1992 issue of *Sunday*, the magazine of the Lord's Day Alliance. It provided some interesting historical information, especially in light of the fact that the Lord's Day Alliance is the primary religious group in America urging Sunday sacredness.

Here are several quotations from this gushing article of praise. **Key points will be in bold print.** Do not underrate its importance. **This article briefly summarizes outstanding events in the history of the LDA, and declares that its capstone achievement, to date, has been its "hands across the gulf" approach to friendship with major church leaders in several important denominations outside of its normal Evangelical base: Roman Catholic, Seventh-day Adventist, Anglican, Canadian, Australian, and European church leaders, as well as Greek Orthodox. The article intimates that the Catholic and Adventist connections were especially important.**

Here are highlights from this article:

"The retirement of Lord's Day Alliance Executive Director, James P. Wesberry, in February 1992 marks the end of a second career for one of the

Every so often, I come across something I should have printed years earlier. This is one of those items. Somehow, it became lost in the material I had collected.

great religious leaders of America and a lifetime accomplishment which staggers the imagination.

"Wesberry first retired at age 69 in March 1975 after pastoring Atlanta's Morningside Baptist Church for 31 years. He expected to spend the autumn years writing and preaching. Within seven months, however, he was seated in an office suit of the Atlanta Baptist Center as executive director of the Lord's Day Alliance of the United States.

"Now 16 years later at age 85, Wesberry plans to retire from a second career . . . **He has given the Lord's Day Alliance more exposure than it has ever had, and he has brought it a wider base of support than any of his predecessors in the 103-year-old organization.** [Later in this article, the statement is made that the LDA was founded in 1888. As you may know, there was a strong effort within the next few years to enact a National Sunday Law in the United States. It was called the Blair Bill.]

"Dedicated to preserving Sunday as a day of rest and worship, **the Lord's Day Alliance moved its headquarters from New York City to Atlanta in 1970** for the convenience of its board of managers and to attract wider support in the Bible Belt.

"**The 79-member board, representing 25 denominations, meets twice a year to plan strategy and make decisions affecting the organization's work and mission.** It is made up of men and women, black and white, of all ages. **During Wesberry's administration the board has been diversified to include** ministers, missionaries, theologians, evangelists, preachers, teachers, educators, college presidents, a former seminary president, a former Miss America, an astronaut, business executives, owners of large businesses, builders, realtors, bankers, lawyers, former governors, former Congressmen, physicians, authors, judges, editors, a general, an admiral, bishops, archbishops, and homemakers.

"Wesberry has not only broadened the support base and diversified the board membership, but

he has also redirected the approach to winning public favor for preserving the Lord's day . . .

"Wesberry, a forward-looking leader who never takes his eyes from the goal, has mapped out a new strategy for the nineties. 'I am thoroughly persuaded that **our best approach is an educational one,**' he said, 'and more and more **we must encourage denominational publications to emphasize the Fourth Commandment and teachings of Jesus concerning the Lord's day** in their literature.'

"Part of the educational strategy to preserve a day of rest and worship involves **an appeal based less on legalism [why 'emphasize the fourth commandment' if they do not want anybody to obey it?] and more on science and psychology.** Alluding to the findings of a Task Force to suggest strategies for preserving the traditional Lord's day in America, Wesberry said: '**We need basic facts to build strong and convincing arguments, physiological, psychological, and economic arguments in the movement of Sabbath reform. There are convincing arguments that all society needs a day of rest. Such a day is demanded for the physical, mental, industrial, political well-being of humankind.**'

"**The alliance announced its strategy for the future during the centennial observance in 1988:** 'Blessing in the integrity of God's creative order and in the redemptive power of the risen Christ to which the Holy Scriptures bear faithful witness, the Lord's Day Alliance, upon entering its second century of service, renews its commitment to encourage, within the Christian community, celebration of Sunday as the Lord's day, and to communicate to all of society the unique benefits of a common day of rest.'

"The centennial celebration was held in the Foundry Methodist Church in Washington, D.C., where the alliance started [in 1888]. At the 100th anniversary the board of managers and friends of the alliance gathered on the steps of the United States Capitol for a service of prayer, thanksgiving and praise. Senator Wyche Fowler of Georgia greeted the group and commended them for their work. Later they heard Norman Vincent Peale at a banquet in the Church of the Pilgrims.

"Earlier in his administration, **Wesberry expanded the alliance's office publication, Sunday magazine, and increased its circulation to a record high.** He changed the format, added lively news articles relative to Sunday Observance, and printed photographs of celebrities and ordinary people engaged in supporting the aims of the alliance. Increased circulation won new friends and donors.

"The educational mission was further strength-

ened by an individual donation which made possible the production of a motion picture called *The Lord's Day*. It was shown worldwide.

"As he prepares to end his tenure with the alliance, **Wesberry senses more support and enthusiasm for the future than ever.** 'The Lord's Day Alliance has renewed vision—a new dream. The alliance has never been more alive. **I don't think there has ever been a time of more intense concern among us than now.**'

". . . [Information on earlier years of Wesberry, presidency of Georgia Baptist Convention, etc.] . . . **He has been an adviser to Presidents of the United States, Congressmen,** and individual members of the Georgia General Assembly . . .

"In addition to pastoring an Atlanta church and fulfilling numerous ministerial responsibilities, **he traveled around the world on preaching missions for the United States Air Force . . .** He was instrumental in founding Atlanta Baptist College.

" 'We are rediscovering new and better ways of handling our problems,' Wesberry said. 'Our new ways are old ways. We are turning once again to the Bible and to the church for our answers . . .'

"**Part of the new approach of turning back to the church led him to find ways for major religious bodies to agree rather than remain polarized because of theological differences.** In the sincere ecumenical spirit that has characterized his ministry, **Wesberry singled out prominent church leaders [in denominations not in the LDA] for recognition by the Lord's Day Alliance, recognizing them for their leadership in preserving Sunday as a day of rest and worship.**

"At the annual meeting in Atlanta in 1978, **Wesberry made history by joining hands for the first time with the Roman Catholic clergy, in a mutual goal to preserve the Lord's day.** The board of managers were entertained in a Catholic church because of Wesberry's friendship with the Monsignor.

"**He also made history for the alliance when he spoke at Andrews University and Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan, and led in exploration of ways the Lord's Day Alliance and the Seventh-day Adventists could work together.** 'In spite of differences of opinion in reference to the Sabbath question,' Wesberry explained, '**we had clasped hands across these differences and denominational lines and felt the warm, sincere grip and gracious friendship among brothers and sisters in Christ.**'

"Together with the heads of the New England Lord's Day League, Wesberry visited **the governor of New Hampshire** and presented a plaque in ap-

preciation of **his dedication to preserving the Lord's day.**

“On a visit to London, he conferred with the director of the Lord's Day Observance Society and invited him to America for consultation and finding ways to work towards a mutual goal.

“We are doing our best to keep contact with other similar bodies throughout the world and give them all the encouragement we can,’ Wesberry said. **The effort led him to an association with the People-For-Sunday Association of Canada, as well as Lord's Day societies of Holland, Australia, and Nigeria.**

“**The Lord's Day Alliance had helped me cross all denominational lines and to become an intimate friend of a Roman Catholic archbishop,**’ Wesberry said. The archbishop had been a good friend of the alliance and twice had helped entertain the board of managers in Atlanta. When the man became terminally ill, Wesberry visited him in the hospital, knelt beside his wheelchair, took his hand, and prayed for him. ‘My life and **the Lord's Day Alliance had been richly blessed through him,**’ Wesberry said.

“He went to New York and presented a plaque to the Primate of the Greek Orthodox Church in North and South America, and in turn welcomed a representative of the Orthodox Church to the alliance's board of managers.

“He went to Lambeth Palace in London to present **a plaque to the Archbishop of Canterbury.** And **he went to Rome and presented a plaque to the Pope.**

“Collecting the messages of various leaders on preservation of the Sabbath, Wesberry brought out a book, entitled *The Lord's Day*, and **presented it as a gift to all theological seminary and Bible school libraries** in the United States and to several leading pastors and church leaders. [If anyone can find that book, it probably includes messages from Adventist leaders.]

“Wesberry's influence on the Lord's Day Alliance has been indelible. But what about the future?

“According to Wesberry, the prospects for a bright future have never been better. **‘The Lord's Day Alliance and its affiliates are being revitalized,**’ Wesberry said. ‘They seem to be having a new birth. We are being revived again. It is happening in our national organization and all our affiliates. **We believe that the Lord's Day is the keystone of civilization and determines the future power and glory of our nation.**’—James C. Bryant, *The Lord's Day Man: James Pickett*

Wesberry, Spring 1992 issue of Sunday, the journal of the Lord's Day Alliance.

I was living in southern Illinois, and had only recently started Pilgrims Rest, when we received a flyer in the mail. It was the late 1970s. The paper advertised a large interdenominational Protestant meeting, to be held within a month or so in Marion, Illinois. The announcement called for all Christians to gather to a special meeting, sponsored by the Lord's Day Alliance. The featured speaker would be Samuele Bacchiocchi. Said to be a Seventh-day Adventist Bible teacher at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, Bacchiocchi was especially lauded in the flyer for two facts: First, he had graduated with a doctorate in theology from the Gregorian University in Rome, the oldest Jesuit Roman Catholic higher educational institution in the world. Second, he wanted all churches to enter the blessing of the Sabbath rest, whatever day it might be on.

It is possible that it was through Bacchiocchi and Wesberry's mutual Vatican contacts that they were brought together, making it possible for Wesberry to meet with our leaders at Andrews and for Bacchiocchi to be launched on a tour of a number of cities, where he spoke on behalf of the Lord's Day Alliance.

There are many mysteries that we will not understand until we get to heaven. But, fortunately, there are facts in God's Word which we can know now—which we should not be ignorant of.

“When the leading churches of the United States, uniting upon such points of doctrine as are held by them in common, shall influence the state to enforce their decrees and to sustain their institutions, then Protestant America will have formed an image of the Roman hierarchy, and the infliction of civil penalties upon dissenters will inevitably result . . . ‘The beast’ mentioned in this message, whose worship is enforced by the two-horned beast, is the first, or leopardlike beast of Revelation 13—the papacy. The ‘image to the beast’ represents that form of apostate Protestantism which will be developed when the Protestant churches shall seek the aid of the civil power for the enforcement of their dogmas.”—*Great Controversy*, 445.

“In the issue of the contest all Christendom will be divided into two great classes—those who keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and those who worship the beast and his image and receive his mark.”—*Great Controversy*, 450.

The Other Side of Left Behind

Left Behind is the most popular religious video and movie in America just now. But would you like to know the other side of the story? It involves some of the leading rapturist writers and speakers in America.

In 1996, Joe Goodman walked into a religious bookstore, picked up a copy of a new book on the rapture, and looked inside. *Left Behind* was the first novel co-authored by Tim LaHaye and Jerry Jenkins. LaHaye developed the ideas and Jenkins wrote the book.

At the time, the book had not yet reached the 100,000 sales mark (later it would become the first of a series of *Left Behind* rapture books), yet Goodman was fascinated by the plot and decided it would make an outstanding motion picture.

Goodman already had his own Namesake Entertainment, a Louisville, Kentucky, firm, which had earlier produced TV films for Disney and USA Network.

Within several months (in early 1997) he had secured the film rights, either to the book (LaHaye's position) or to the book series (Goodman's contention).

But Goodman failed to find a Hollywood studio willing to make the movie. Knowing he had to make the film within three years or lose on a forfeiture clause, he visited Cloud Ten.

Cloud Ten Pictures was a Toronto, Canada, production company run by brothers Peter and Paul Lalonde, former Christian broadcasters.

The Lalondes were already in the end-times film business, having made a 1998 videotape, *Apocalypse*, and a 1999 film, *Revelation*.

Cloud Ten did most of the actual work in making the movie. Under the arrangement, Goodman and the Lalondes were co-producers. Cloud Ten signed up a cast and made the movie in Ontario with a budget, the Lalondes say, of \$17.4 million, including marketing. The movie script told the essentials of what was in the book, although it veered somewhat.

In order to promote the book, Goodman and the Lalondes decided on an unusual—and risky—strategy. They released *Left Behind: The Movie* on videotape three months ahead of the apocalyptic thriller's scheduled box-office opening on February 2, 2001.

The objective was to stir up immense enthusiasm among evangelicals, who, in turn, would take their unchurched friends to see the movie. Part of the plan also included enlisting churches to sponsor theater screenings at \$3,000 per screen,—and fill the movie houses with non-Christians.

Well, that was the plan. But it got left behind.

Although warned that they had better not take such a risk, everything initially worked out well, for 3 million videos were sold within the first three months.

But when the movie opened in February, it appeared on 867 screens and only ranked 17th in box-office draw. In the first three weeks, according to published reports it only grossed \$3.7 million. Yet the movie cost \$17.4 million to produce. In comparison, *The Omega Code* was one of the top 10 national movies the weekend it was released.

(Are you wondering how all these movies appear in the eyes of God? Just read chapter 27, *Modern Revivals*, in the book, *Great Controversy*, and you will have your answer.)

But that is not the end of the story. Now the modern revivalists are suing one another over *Left Behind!*

In July 2000, Tim LaHaye, a former pastor and pro-family activist (and husband of Beverly LaHaye, head of Concerned Women for America), filed a breach-of-contract suit against Goodman's Namesake Entertainment. LaHaye alleges that Namesake promised to spend more than \$40 million on the film, that it would feature big-name actors, that it would appear in all major media markets by January 1, 2000 (to capitalize on the millennium craze), and that LaHaye would help select the film's director. He also accused Namesake of risking a valuable franchise on a foolish and unproven video-first marketing scheme.

There was also a blistering argument concerning whether the contract permitted Goodman to make more movies of the rest of the books in the series.

Namesake contends that it tried to make a big-budget film, and the contract gave it three years—till April 2001—to produce the film.

The fighting waxed hotter. LaHaye said he should also have part ownership (and receive profits from) T-shirts, jewelry, and other religious items sold with the movie name on them. But Goodman says the money will help them turn out more religious films.

Another movie in the series, *Tribulation*, is scheduled for release in 2002, but LaHaye is determined, through the courts, to stop it.

In February 2001, a federal judge in Los Angeles rejected a motion by the makers of *Left Behind: The Movie*, which sought dismissal of LaHaye's lawsuit.

So North America's leading Christian rapturists are busily fighting fellow rapturists in the courts. Will their infighting and court battles end before their expected rapture to heaven occurs?

Only time will tell.

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