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the launching pad

With **C. MERVYN MAXWELL**
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Q. I live in Houston, Texas, and my Catholic neighbors now tell me they can get their Sundays free by attending mass on Saturday night. It seems as though Catholics have become as good Sabbath-keepers as Seventh-day Adventists!

A. Houston isn't the only place. The custom has been growing elsewhere, as well.

It doesn't make Sabbathkeepers out of Catholics, however. Since the beginnings of the Christian Era many holy days have customarily been viewed as starting at sundown on the day before. Thus we still have Christmas preceded by "Christmas Eve," because the Catholic Church through the centuries has held special Christmas services on the evening before December 25.

The custom is based, of course, on the Biblical command respecting the Sabbath: "From evening to evening shall you keep your sabbath" (Leviticus 23:32, R.S.V.). Pope Leo I (440-461) in the fifth century made a point of the fact that in his day Sunday was "commonly held to begin on the evening of Saturday."

A Sabbath-morning mass does not take the place of a Sunday-morning mass; only a Saturday-night mass does. Saturday night is really "Sunday evening" in the same sense that Christmas Eve is really part of Christmas Day. A Saturday-night mass is really an extra-early Sunday-morning mass.

Attending a Saturday-night mass doesn't constitute Sabbathkeeping, because it occurs after the Sabbath is past and because Biblical Sabbathkeeping requires more than church attendance. The whole "day" (from Friday evening to Saturday evening) must be kept holy.

Q. Would you please let me know why Seventh-day Adventists allow the practice of vivisection? An Adventist writer, Ellen G. White (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, page 443), seems to condemn the practice: "He who will abuse animals because he has them in his power is both a coward and a tyrant."

A. The new Loma Linda University medical school buildings contain a 20,000 square-foot vivarium dedicated to animal experimentation, including fifty-five dog runs and two operating rooms large enough to handle experimental organ-transplant surgery. In this laboratory animals are not "abused,"

but handled as humanely as possible with the help of anesthetics and sterile technique.

Whenever I think of what polio used to do to children I thank God for the men in every medical school who conduct experiments on animals.

Jesus said, "One of them [sparrows] shall not fall on the ground without your Father. . . . Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows" (Matthew 10:29-31). God loves sparrows—and monkeys, and white mice, and rats. He loves children too, much more.

So do I.

Don't you?

Q. For many years my son has asked why God so often worked in "forties" in the Bible—forty years, forty days and nights, and so on. I have asked many ministers and rabbis, and none of them has been able to give me an answer.

A. There are many forties in the Bible. Moses' life was divided into three even forty-year periods, the Israelites wandered forty years in the wilderness, Elijah went forty days on the strength of a single meal, and Jesus fasted forty days after His baptism. There are several periods of forty years—and of eighty years (twice forty) and of twenty years (half of forty) in the book of Judges.

Some of these may well be precise periods of forty actual days or forty actual years. Why not? Chronological data in the Bible have a disarming way of turning out to be correct once we understand them better.

Sometimes forty may be a round number like our English terms "fortnight" and "weekend."

Sometimes forty years equals a "generation." In Matthew 24:34 Jesus said about the destruction of Jerusalem, "This generation shall not pass, until all these things be fulfilled." Almost exactly forty years later (in A.D. 70) the Romans razed the Temple to the ground. In Psalm 95:10 God said, "Forty years long was I grieved with this generation."

Sometimes the term is known to be inexact. On the Moabite Stone the pagan king Mesha states that his nation was in subservience to the Israelite kings Ahab and Omri for forty years—even though Ahab and Omri reigned for a total of only thirty-four years and probably were not dominant over the Moabites all that time.

Other numbers than forty were also common, of

course, in Bible times. For example, there were twelve disciples, twelve gates to the New Jerusalem, and twelve tribes.

Q. When the conscience of a GI bothers him about shelling villages and killing innocent people, what good can his military chaplain do him? A chaplain is so tied to the military establishment he works for that he cannot counsel soldiers according to his own true beliefs, but only according to military regulations. Wouldn't it be a good thing if our chaplains could be completely dissociated from the military?

A. 1. Only ordained ministers are eligible to be chaplains, and all ordained ministers may claim deferment under classification IV-D. This means that all military chaplains are volunteers and may be assumed to have followed their conscience in choosing to become chaplains.

2. Chaplains must be well trained prior to induction, and normally hold at least a B.D. degree. It may be assumed that most of them think their position through carefully before signing up.

3. All denominations are free to provide their own civilian chaplains, housed immediately adjacent to military bases. This works fine for land-based military personnel outside of actual fighting zones; and, in addition, the military is cooperative in helping soldiers not immediately engaged in fighting to meet with representative clergymen of their churches from time to time when proper arrangements have been made in advance. The civilian chaplain may not be a valid option, of course, for sailors on shipboard or soldiers in active combat.

4. If the Government did not provide military chaplains at all, it would be open to the charge of violating the First Amendment, for when men are lawfully removed from their homes and deprived of their right to worship in the churches of their choice, the Government must provide a substitute if it is to avoid restricting freedom to worship.

Q. I have a friend who every now and then makes a sneering reference to "snake-handling fundamentalists." I can't believe there are any such people still around in this day and age, but I don't know for sure. Could you give me the word?

A. Your friend happens to be right. There still are snake-handling fundamentalists; in fact, they're still fairly strong throughout the Appalachian sections of Virginia, West Virginia, Tennessee, and Kentucky.

Snake-handling fundamentalists take their cue from Mark 16, where Jesus instructed the apostles that if, in their mission to evangelize the world, they were bitten by snakes or given poisonous food, they would not be harmed. Modern-day sects deliberately handle snakes and drink lye merely to demonstrate their faith, which cannot possibly be what Jesus had in mind. Surprisingly, they often survive, though not always. Last September a Mr. Pelfry, sixty-five years of age, was bitten while handling a snake and died, in spite of an all-night prayer meeting for his recovery.

Not surprisingly, snake handling is forbidden by law in Virginia, and members of snake-handling sects are subject to arrest.

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