

Friday Church News Notes

Italian Archaeologists Find Evidence that December 25 Tied to Paganism

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The following is excerpted from an Associated Press article "First December 25 Xmas Tied to Pagan Shrine," dated Dec. 22, 2007: "The church where the tradition of celebrating Christmas on Dec. 25 may have begun was built near a pagan shrine as part of an effort to spread Christianity, a leading Italian scholar says. Italian archaeologists last month unveiled an underground grotto that they believe ancient Romans revered as the place where a wolf nursed Rome's legendary founder Romulus and his twin brother Remus. A few feet from the grotto, or 'Lupercal,' the Emperor Constantine built the Basilica of St. Anastasia, where some believe Christmas was first celebrated on Dec. 25. ... In 325, Constantine convened the Council of Nicaea, which fixed the dates of important Christian festivals. It opted to mark Christmas, then celebrated at varying dates, on Dec. 25 to coincide with the Roman festival celebrating the birth of the sun god, Andrea Carandini, a professor of archaeology at Rome's La Sapienza University, told reporters Friday. The Basilica of St. Anastasia was built as soon as a year after the Nicaean Council. It probably was where Christmas was first marked on Dec. 25, part of broader efforts to link pagan practices to Christian celebrations in the early days of the new religion, Carandini said. 'The church was built to Christianize these pagan places of worship,' he said. 'It was normal to put a church near these places to try to save them.'" **CONCLUDING NOTE FROM BROTHER CLOUD:** I have visited Rome three times and on each occasion I have been more strongly impressed by the fact that Roman Catholicism is Christianized paganism. See part 4 of our report "In the Footsteps of Bible Translators" -- <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbns/in-the-footsteps-bibletrans/Page-4.htm>. The Protestants kept too many of Rome's practices, and Baptists have adopted too many things from the Protestants. If someone wants to meditate on Jesus' birth at this time of the year, that is their business as far as I am



The Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem, Michel Sabbah, kneels in front of a statue of Baby Jesus after placing it in the grotto following the Catholic Christmas Midnight Mass at the Church of the Nativity compound in the West Bank town of Bethlehem.

concerned, but we must not deceive ourselves by thinking that Christmas is a biblical institution. It has far more to do with Romanism and paganism than biblicism. One thing wise Christians can do with Christmas is use it as an evangelistic opportunity. It is a great opportunity to explain who Jesus is and why He came.

Life's Short.. Have

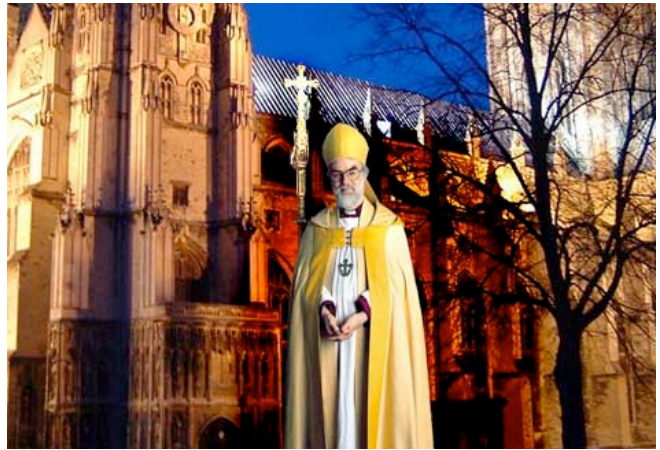


"Life's Short, Have Fun" is the theme of a sermon series at Element Church, Chesterfield, Missouri. It is described like this: "There are some who say living for God is boring. 'Did you know that God is the creator of fun? Living for God can be the most fulfilling, satisfying kind of fun that you'll experience (with no side effects the next day). Sure, life can be challenging, but God has the ultimate plan of fun for your life if you'll just take the time to discover it.'" My friends, though there are great blessings in the Christian life, there is no emphasis upon "fun" in the Bible. The emphasis is upon repentance, faith, obedience, the fear of God, surrender, self-denial, spiritual vigilance, and spotless separation from the world. Sadly, those who are crying for liberty and fun today are described in 2 Timothy 4:3-4. They want a new kind of "fun" Christianity and they search out preachers that will preach a non-judgment message and that will encourage them in their idolatry of "fun" and their yearnings for carnal "liberty." The only time they turn really judgmental is when someone tries to expose their error. "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables."

HEAD OF ANGLICAN CHURCH SAYS VIRGIN BIRTH NOT NECESSARY TO CHRISTIAN FAITH

Speaking on BBC *Radio Five*, Rowan Williams, Archbishop of Canterbury, said that although he “believes” in the virgin birth of Christ he advised that new Christians need not fear that they had to leap over the “hurdle” of belief in the Virgin Birth before they could be “signed up” (“It’s All a Christmas Tall Story,” *The Times*, Dec. 20, 2007). In fact, it is difficult to know in what sense Williams himself “believes” in the virgin birth, because *The Times* reported: “He hinted that decades ago he was not ‘too fussed’ with the literal truth of the doctrine of the Virgin Birth. But as time went on, he developed a ‘deeper sense’ of what the Virgin Birth was all about.” Theological liberals have this amazing way of believing that biblical statements are true even when they (allegedly) aren’t historical facts. It is an abuse of language, of course, but it is part of the deception of heresy. Anyway, it is certain that the Archbishop claims that belief in the virgin birth is not a necessary part of the Christian faith, and that is a gross error. If Jesus was not literally virgin born He was a mere sinner just like the rest of us, and he was not therefore the eternal Son of God, and he could not have made atonement for our sin by his sacrifice. Further, if Christ was not virgin born the Bible is a lie. The virgin birth of Christ is at the

very heart of the biblical Christian faith, and it is no “hurdle” to those who believe in Almighty God. If one believes that Genesis 1 is true, then Matthew 1 follows easily. “Now the birth of Jesus Christ was on this wise: When as his mother Mary was espoused to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child of the Holy Ghost” (Matthew 1:18).



SECRET DOCUMENT REVEALS CHINESE GOVERNMENT’S CAMPAIGN AGAINST UNREGISTERED CHURCHES

The following is excerpted from a report by the Christian Aid Association dated November 13, 2007: “CAA recently received a secret document from a reliable government source showing the Chinese government has been launching a nationwide campaign against unregistered Christian churches since July of this year. The ‘confidential’ (jimi) document was issued on July 24, 2007, by Duodao District Committee Office of Jingmen Municipality of the Communist Party of China, Hubei province. ... The document ... was issued to all township and neighborhood Party committees, all people’s governments, neighborhood offices, and relevant work units. ... Though this document was issued in a local level, it does reveal that the central government has directed a national campaign specifically against unregistered Christian House churches. ... By urging the government-sanctioned patriotic Christian organizations to work closely with the public security agents, the aim of the campaign is to establish ‘a socialized mechanism of management of religious affairs.’ ... for unauthorized churches that were found preaching ‘heresies, religious fanaticism, feudal superstition, or harm the physical and mental health of the people, and violate the laws of the state,’ the public security agencies are urged to ‘resolutely crack down on them and abolish them on the basis of sufficient evidence.’ ... Finally the whole campaign was asked to be carried out in super secrecy. ... ‘This campaign is another clear example of absolute violation of the relevant international human rights covenants and China’s own Constitution on protection of citizen’s religious freedom,’ said Bob Fu, ‘We urge the Chinese government to stop this kind of illegal secret practice if China intends to be a true respected responsible stakeholder in the international community.’”

CONCLUDING NOTE FROM BROTHER CLOUD: In 2005 evangelist Luis Palau said Chinese churches should register with the government in order to “receive greater freedom and blessings from the government” (“Luis Palau Says Chinese Churches Should Register,” *Christian Post*, Nov. 21, 2005). He said the Christian “faith should not be used as a pretense to defy the law” and “believers should live in the open.” In fact, the Bible says that if there is a conflict between man’s law and God’s, we must obey God, and the Chinese government puts severe restrictions upon registered churches and does not allow them to freely fulfill Christ’s Great Commission by preaching the gospel to every person and nation and thoroughly discipling those that believe (Matthew 28:18-20; Mark 16:15). Palau said, “In the past, pastors have been restricted and arrested. Today, you don’t get arrested unless you break the law.” The callous ignorance of that statement is shocking. Palau needs to apologize to the courageous believers in China who refuse to bow the knee to Caesar. He visited there briefly and saw no persecution; he should rather live there for a few years and spend time with the persecuted brethren, or at least those knowledgeable of them, before opening his mouth on such an important issue. “Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

Calvinism on the Rise in the Southern Baptist Convention

A new study shows that Calvinism is on the rise in the Southern Baptist Convention and is especially prominent among recent seminary graduates. Ed Stetzer, director of LifeWay Research, says that nearly 30% of recent graduates now serving as pastors are Calvinists (“Calvinism on the Rise,” *Christian Post*, Nov. 29, 2007). Roughly 10% of SBC pastors at large define themselves as Calvinists, but that includes only those who hold to all five points of TULIP theology and not those who hold to sovereign or unconditional election but not necessarily to all other points of Calvinism. LifeWay Research limits their surveys to a narrow definition of Calvinism, and I suspect it might not want to report the true influence of Calvinism in the convention. A chief culprit in the growth of Calvinism is literature. The writings of men such as John Piper and John MacArthur are popular among fundamentalists. The writings of the Puritans and of Charles Spurgeon, who, by his own testimony, was deeply influenced by the Puritans, also contribute to the growth of Calvinism. I admire a great many things about Spurgeon and the Puritans, and about many

modern-day Calvinists, as well, but I vehemently disagree with Reformed theology regardless of who teaches it and how much I might agree with them on other matters. I must make an issue of it, because they make an issue of it! I reject the popular Quick Prayerism doctrine just as vehemently, and I have no doubt that the unscripturalness of this misguided evangelistic program and the doctrinal shallowness of many independent Baptist churches and schools has caused some to fall into the arms of Calvinism and its more intellectual approach. Having studied the Bible earnestly and prayerfully for 34 years and having studied both sides of this issue, I am convinced that neither Calvinism nor Quick Prayerism is Scriptural. I have no ill will toward those who differ, and I thank the Lord for every good thing in them; but here I must stand, and I believe it is an issue worth standing for.



a New Breed of Sheepdogs

The following is by Buddy Smith, Malanda, Queensland <smiletex@bigpond.net.au>

The old breed is almost gone. Border collies, Kelpies, Blue Heelers, and “Bitsers” (bits of this and bits of that) are seldom seen among the sheep any more. Instead of Old Blue guarding the flock, we see a new breed that is part poodle and part Basenji. Basenji can't bark, but they can yodel and howl. Isaiah 56:9-12 is the only text in the Bible on sheepdogs. It describes “dumb dogs (that) cannot bark, sleeping, lying down, loving to slumber... greedy dogs which can never have enough, that cannot understand, they all look to their own way, every one for his gain.” A better description of toothless, spineless, voiceless shepherds of God's flock could hardly be found. We hear from them no warning growl to alert the flock of approaching

apostasy. We hear no bark of authority from the pulpit. We see in them no fierce defenders of the lambs. Gone are the fangs, and the lightning attacks on ravening lions and wolves in sheep's clothing. How long has it been since we saw a pastor with backbone and grit who was set for the defence of the gospel? We might as well admit it; most of them have been pensioned off and replaced by a poodle/Basenji cross. They can't bark, but they can put on a good show. They go to the hairdresser to be permed and perfumed, petted and pampered. They have been trained how to pirouette and beg and roll over and play dead. But barking is no longer part of the course. *Christianity Today* recently printed an article on the “Attack Dogs of Christendom.” The article was supposed to be an expose' of the good men who still know how to bark. When I read it I thought I heard a “basenjipoodle” yelp because of a well aimed stone. Is it possible that Old Blue nipped a lapdog in the pocketbook? Or wakened it from its nap? Did someone rebuke a cute and cuddly clergyperson for welcoming a unitarian wolf into his flock? Did Fido eat Fifi's beefsteak? It might pay, the next time you hear one of the Pope's lapdogs howl to ask why? If we listen to Christian radio stations and TV broadcasts, we will soon hear the yodel of a “basenjipoodle.” It is a whiny sound that appeals to the megachurch crowd, and fits right in with the beat of CCM. But it has no resemblance whatsoever to the songs of the redeemed. It isn't easy to find an old dog who still knows how to bark, but there are still a few around. If you come across one, hold on to him. They know how to obey the Good Shepherd, and will die for the sheep in order to protect them. Just like their Master.



Conclusion

Friends in Christ, do not be discouraged by any of this. It is God's will that we know the times (1 Ch. 12:32; Mat. 16:3) and that we be as wise as serpents and harmless as doves. These things remind us that the hour is very late, and we need to be ready for the coming of the Lord. Are you sure that you are born again? Are you living for Christ day by day? "And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep: for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed. The night is far spent, the day is at hand: let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof" (Rom. 13:11-14). This material is sent only to those who personally subscribe to the Fundamental Baptist Information Service list. To SUBSCRIBE or UNSUBSCRIBE or CHANGE ADDRESSES go to <http://www.wayoflife.org/fbis/subscribe.html>. Way of Life Literature, P.O. Box 610368, Port Huron, MI 48061, 866-295-4143, fbns@wayoflife.org. David Cloud is the director of Way of Life Literature and author of the Friday Church News Notes.